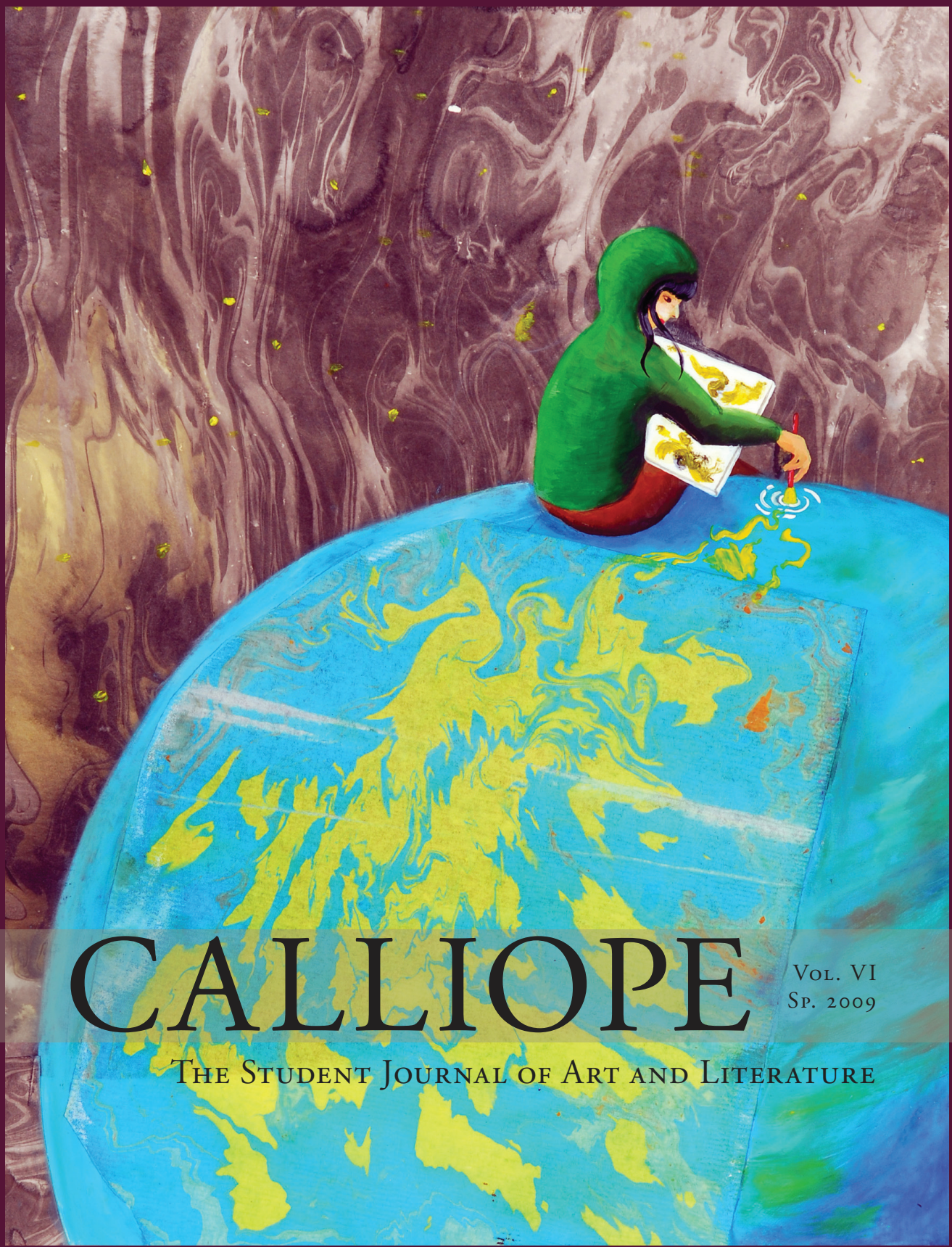

CALLIOPE

Vol. VI
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The Student Journal of Art and Literature

Annandale Campus
Northern Virginia Community College

CALLIOPE

The Student Journal of Art and Literature
Volume VI — Spring 2009

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The Calliope Committee extends special appreciation to Annandale faculty and staff in the following offices, divisions, and committees for their continued and generous support of this endeavor:

- The Office of the Provost;The Office of Student Development;
- The Division of Languages and Literature;
- The Division of Liberal Arts;
- The Lyceum Committee;
- The Languages and Literature Events Committee;
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Submissions are welcomed from September through February each year at Calliope@nvcc.edu. Submission guidelines are available at http://www.nvcc.edu/Annandale/langlit/eng/calliope. Calliope reserves the right to reprint and present submitted works on the Calliope website and other media. Students interested in joining the Calliope staff as interns should contact the editors at the address above.

calliope *kal<e>i:opi. U.S. (Gr. Kallioph)*

(beautiful-voiced), the ninth of the Muses,
presiding over eloquence and heroic poetry.

1. An instrument consisting of a series of
steam-whistles toned to produce musical notes,
played by a keyboard like that of an organ

2. attrib. calliope hummingbird,
a hummingbird, sellula ***calliope***, of the
Western United States and Mexico.
Oxford English Dictionary

ELIXIR OF THE EAST

by Majdah Gama

Calliope Best in Publication 2009, Literary Submissions

"There is a certain Love that is formed out of the elixir of the east"
—Rumi

I've seen you in souks that spill with people,
On streets that reek of three continents,

Found you filling cut-glass crystal with the scent
Of nine woods and the rose petals of three cities.

You shone through petrol-smoked markets in pearls
Of resin gum, bangles of bridal gold, and thin fingers of saffron;

Left muddy footprints of cardamom coffee in demitasse
Cups, on the rainy tables of London's Edgeware Rd.

Behind the glass of TV sets, western tongues have
Long worried the meat of you: Palestine; Iraq; black oil.

If I could bargain you back from insurgents and armies,
From the pockets of Royals, Presidents and Mahdis

I'd place you in the hollows of my body: the naked wrists,
The downturned neck; these deserts starve for your rain.

THE JUPITER ROOM

by Brandon Alexander Rickey

Calliope 3rd Prize 2009, Literary Submissions

"Everything was beautiful and nothing hurt."
—Kurt Vonnegut

For two years, I did not exist. My body was here, floating around aimlessly day in and day out, separated indefinitely from mind and soul. Days would bend and fold upon one another until eventually time stood still. Dark shadows and brilliant highlights of a clouded spark called "life." Every morning I would wake up numb to my existence, find my way to the nearest outlet and abuse my body to a newly defined plane of oblivion, a rinse and repeat lifestyle. I remember that things didn't always used to be that way.

The entire flight was a blur; the cab ride to the hotel, putting our bags in different corners of the room like animals marking territory—all a blur. I couldn't believe that I was there. After saving up the entire length of my senior year for a two-week trip to London, England, four of my friends and I were finally sitting in our hotel room, incapable of wiping the excited smiles off of our faces. The trip was the relief I needed from the stresses of life back in my blue-collar, suburban nightmare discontentedly called home. My friends and I soaked up every drop of the sights, the history and the culture—the pub beverages we weren't legally allowed back in the United States. Inside those pubs, we looked like another group of underage Americans being reckless and irresponsible. In our eyes, we were four boys that weren't going to die in a small town. We were invincible.

By the end of our trip, we were far from that. Worn and fading from long nights of excess, we mustered the will for one more night of debauchery—our last night in heavenly London. We decided earlier in the day we would spend our last night at a newly opened club nearby, which we found was hard to miss walking up to from a couple blocks away. Gigantic pink and purple neon lights beamed out into the night, spelling out something new and exciting for those souls in search of a good time: "The Jupiter Room."

I wasn't ready for how instantly things changed as soon as we stepped through the doors. Girls high up on poles, people moving in unison like one giant wave on the dance floor. The DJ on the stage looked like a Grecian deity, these people were here in worship of him - this was his church. We stepped down to the bar and swallowed a few rounds of foreign beers and liquors, the works. I couldn't stop laughing while we were dancing—it was the making of

one of the best nights of my life. A few hours into the party, a young girl I had met that night named Sophia invited me back into the VIP room where she happened to be a friend of the bouncer. I stumbled my way to the room like the village idiot, but played it off well enough to get into the private booth she had set up for us. She ordered a couple drinks and then closed our curtain.

Sophia eased over to me and planted her lips on my neck and whispered into my ear, "I like you, you're different. I want you. Do you want me?" I was lost in the situation at hand; I nodded like a little marionette with its mouth open. She dug through her purse and pulled out a little silver compact with something white inside, I thought it was make-up at first. She dabbed a little on her finger and then snorted it up her nose, then turned to me and poured a little out onto the glass-topped table and made a neat little line of what I now realized was cocaine. "For you," she said. I tried to play it off coolly, "I don't really mess with that shit, it's not my thing. You've got it." She smirked and sat back in the booth staring through my soul with enormous, beautiful blue eyes. Taunting me. So, in my own vulgar display of inebriated celebration, I said what the hell and entered a new realm after that one line shot up my nose. Somewhere I never expected to be.

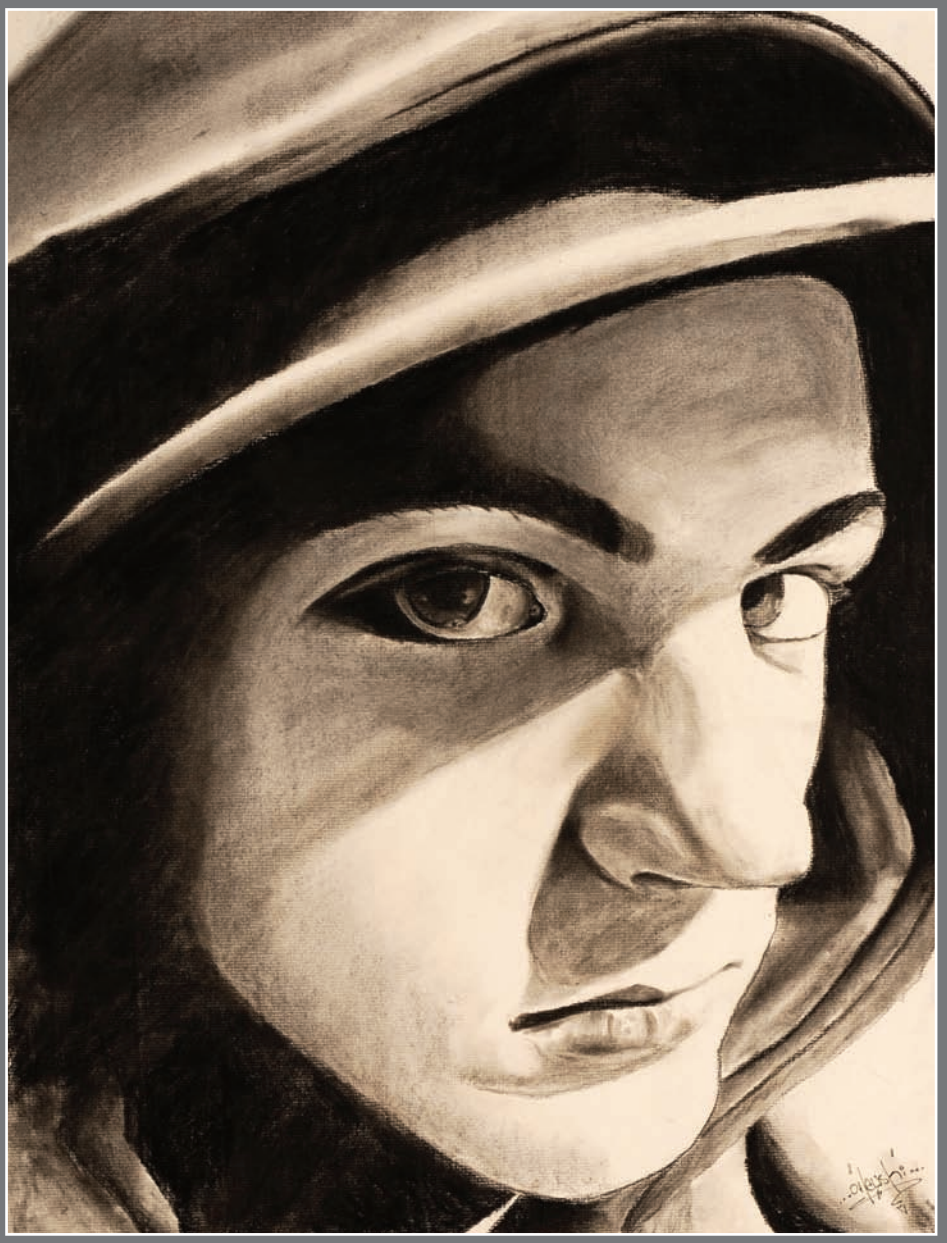
I looked up from the table to find myself slowly drifting through a vector. The illusion of time was gone and I felt the overwhelming euphoria that was escape. Every problem I had nestled in a little ball in the back of my mind disappeared. There was no future, there was no past—there was no pain. The best way to describe the feeling I had at that moment was this: if Jesus Christ himself descended from the clouds at that moment and said to me, "My child, I want you leave this earth with me and serve with my father, God, in heaven at my side." Even if, the feeling of that drug coursing through my veins, raising my heartbeat and blinding me from the infinite abyss of a life waiting in front of me, was better than an offer from Christ.

I don't remember anything else after the VIP booth with Sophia, I just remember waking up in the hotel room the following morning to the sound of my friends chattering about how crazy the night before was. As I expected, Sophia was nowhere in sight. Not one of my friends had any clue about what I had done, knowing that filled me with this strange excitement accompanied with a shot glass of guilt—my dirty little secret. We packed our bags and before I had time to blink I was sitting on my bed back home in my room, staring blankly into the universe that presented itself as my wall. Back to the jobs I didn't want to do, back to this small town with its close-minded ideals, back to the nerves of preparing for college in the fall—back to reality. Escape. That's all I could think about, that feeling. I needed it. I craved it. I needed it so badly that I took money out of the college savings account my family had set up for me and drove to the dirtiest parts of downtown in the city until I found salvation.

What exactly is the price of salvation? Some might say it's the reward for a life of servitude, praising the highest judge of natural existence without a second's thought. On the other end of the spectrum, I found salvation in a conveniently bagged, self-medicating form priced at $100 a gram. This was the end of times, the inevitable disgrace of self-being. The powder-lined trudge to my own crucifixion—mind, body and soul. Several months of this went by, the distinct reminiscent drips creeping down my throat, always on the edge of the world—so sick, yet so beautiful. One year quickly phased to two. I didn't go to school that fall, I left my family and my home behind. The last clear memory I had of anything was my final night in London, like this was all just one long day that wouldn't end, like summer vacation for the rest of my life.

One afternoon two years after my trip to London, after two years of drug abuse and virtually no contact with my friends or family, I finally woke up. It wasn't my doing. Everything in my line of vision was fuzzy and my blood felt ice-cold flowing through my veins, I didn't even know where I was at first until I looked down at my arm and saw the IV sticking out of it. My mother was sitting at my bedside crying quietly while my father slumped in the chair with a solemn grimace on his face. Clarity was coming back to me slowly—I remember. I remember the night before, I was at a party and I had been doing more cocaine in an hour than most do in a day. God, why? I overdosed. God, why. My stomach sank through the bed and on to the floor. I overdosed and I was in the hospital. The only word I could force out of my mouth was "Mom." She launched forward and latched her arms around my frame and cried more deeply than I had ever heard or felt in my life. My heart exploded into a million pieces and the shards rested on the floor with my stomach. What had I done to us? What had I done to all of us, my family? What had I done to me?

One year later, somewhere between nostalgia and regret is where I rest. The days aren't as beautiful as they once were, nothing really is. Nothing seems as important as it once was, but I'm content with the now. I'm making the best of a horrible decision I made when I was a boy, now I am a man. A man that realized there is something more to this mix-up we call life, more than addiction at least. It's weird to think about it sometimes; how drastically different I am from the insecure boy that used to sit in the back of classrooms daydreaming, kissing his grandmother on the cheek in the picture perfect example of innocence on his fifth birthday, the All-American boy playing baseball growing up, making his mother proud. The same boy that worked all year long to afford a trip to London just to come back with the promises of a lifetime interchanged with a drug problem. That boy is The Jupiter Room; the walls, the floor, the foundation. That boy is the cement, the woodwork, the lights and the curtains. That boy is the dream. That boy is long gone, and I miss him.



Self-Portrait
by Oktavian Otlewski

Calliope First Prize 2009, Art

SLIPPERY SLOPES

by Linda Jean King

slippery slopes
 slippery soap
  suds foam like a pregnant dandelion
   one puff and
 as light as a feathered pillow
 encased in cotton
  sheets billowed and tenting
 twisting around and around
  legs and toes and
    thighs and ears and tongues
 teasing
 so pleasing to touch
  the right spot
 spot on
taking a deep breath
 long and slow to tame the pulse
sweat
 always sweat
  even on the coldest day
 leaving streams down my back
 your thighs
  and fluffed into sheets
 warm and sweet
 as if dragged
  from the dryer
 but almost too hot
 to touch
and while this is
 the best it has been
  it's never enough
so slippery soap
 down slippery slopes
 to shoulders and
 ears and legs and
  curls and fingers and cheeks
and …

THE WEDDING

by Andrew Sherwood

The café on the sidewalk was empty, Sunday mornings never bring in big crowds. Armistice Blvd was empty as well. Most people in Pawtucket were at morning mass. Some forgot the church a long time ago. Others forgot the church that morning. Ray was working.

Furtado's Bakery was open seven days a week, even when Ray was the only one there. It was a small shop, most of the space taken up by ovens and prep stations in the back. There was a station for coffee by the front window, people could buy a cup and fill it up themselves as many times as they want. Next to the coffee station was a table with two chairs for people to sit and eat their pastry and drink their coffee or to wait for their order to be ready. In the middle of the floor was the counter where people ordered. It was made of glass so people could see what was available that day, on top of it sat an old punch cash register, no computer in that thing, and a bell to ring in case no one was standing at the counter. Behind the counter was a stand full of bagged baked goods that could wait a day or two before being sold. Today it was full of fresh *masa* and *biscoits* and other rolls and breads.

Ray was in the back at a prep station. He had been there since 6 am working to fill up the rack behind the counter. Now he was crushing two 15 mg Percocet under a dollar bill to snort. He liked the job, but it got boring and needed a distraction. This was no place for coke being by yourself all day and pot became boring years ago. The percs were perfect, he felt, because they gave the desired numbness without the heavy fog or hyperactivity. If he could afford heroin he'd use that, but this was the best he could do.

He heard the bell ring on the counter as he began to snort the first line. He thought about doing the second one, but decided it could wait. He went out to see who was there. It was Mrs. Feingold; old Jewish women were usually his only customers on Sunday mornings.

"Hello, Mrs. Feingold," he said. "What can I get for you today?"

"Oh, I don't know, Sonny," she said. "My grandchildren are coming to town later today and I was thinking of picking up some of that nice Portagee bread you all have."

Ray faked a smile. He hated being called a Portagee, but it's not like he could call her a kike back. "How many masa would you like, ma'am?"

"Oh, how about 2? And maybe a bag of those biscuits."

"A bag of *biscoits* as well. Anything else?"

"No," she said. "With your prices I don't think I could afford much else."

Ray placed two *masas* and a bag of the *biscoits* into a box with Furtado's on the top and placed it on the counter. He punched the order into the old cash register. "That'll be $8.64."

Mrs. Feingold dug in her purse for the exact change and handed it over to Ray.

"Thank you, Mrs. Feingold," Ray said. "Have a good time with the grandkids."

"You know," she said, "I've got my soon to be daughter-in-law with me. She's moving up to Rhode Island to be with Michael in Providence after the wedding and she was wondering about the town. Why don't I bring her in here and you can tell her about it. I figure you two could get along good."

"Why's that?"

"She's one of your people."

"Portuguese?"

"No, Catholic," she said.

Ray didn't know what to make of what Mrs. Feingold said, but faked another smile.

"She's just outside, I'll bring her in and you two should talk. Who knows maybe you'll be friendly."

Ray knew that there was an ulterior motive being she was about to have a Catholic member of the family, but he nodded in agreement. Mrs. Feingold went outside to get her soon to be daughter-in-law and Ray went in the back to do another line. The first was starting to kick in.

"Where'd you go?" Mrs. Feingold called.

Ray turned the corner scratching his nose. "Sorry, just stepped in the back to take care of something."

Ray looked at the soon to be daughter-in-law and stopped. Her name was Rebecca. She wasn't Catholic, she was Presbyterian, she was from Virginia, like Ray. She hadn't changed since the last time they saw each other, her hair was shorter, that was it.

"Rebecca," Mrs. Feingold said, "this is Ray. He runs this bakery."

"Hi," Rebecca said.

"Rebecca," Ray said.

The two just stared at each other, neither moving.

"Well," Mrs. Feingold said, "I'll let you two talk." She walked out of the bakery and left them standing in silence.

Neither broke the silence for awhile. It had been years since they had last seen each other.

"You're probably busy," Rebecca said, "I don't wanna get in your way."

"There's no one here."

"But you probably have stuff to do."

"It's a small bakery in Pawtucket, what the hell would I have to do?"

"I don't wanna be in the way."

"Bec, if you don't want to talk to me then leave, but stop making excuses."

"Fine. We can talk. What happened to your arm?"

Ray looked at the ace bandage on his forearm. "Nothing," he said, taking it off. He showed her the tattoo of a Jolly Roger. "I got it in Kansas a few years back. Boss doesn't want me showing the customers a tattoo on my forearm."

They eased into conversation from there. They were both doing fine. The families were doing fine. Rebecca's sister, Lisa, had gotten married the year before. Ray's brother, Will, was still in the military, but didn't know if he wanted to go career. Ray told her about his trip, driving across the states, about the tattoos he got along the way. Rebecca told him about her job, she still liked it; she was having fun in DC still. They went on uninterrupted, picking up as though there was no gap, for over an hour before things slowed down.

"So," Ray said. "You're marrying a nice Jewish boy."

"In 4 months."

"Is he the guy?"

"No," she said. "We met a year after you left."

"What happened to the guy?"

"I don't really care."

Ray shook his head. "You cared enough to give back the ring."

"I didn't think it was fair for me to keep it."

"No. No, it wasn't."

The silence was back. They were sitting at the table by the coffee, each at the end of their third cup.

"I'm sorry," she said.

Ray didn't look at her. He stared out the window. There were now cars driving up and down Armistice in the early afternoon.

"You gonna marry this one?" he asked.

"Yeah," she said. "I think I am."

"Before you do, you owe me something."

"What's that?"

"I took dancing lessons from Lisa."

"She never told me that."

"I asked her not to."

"What does that have to do with anything?" Rebecca asked.

"I wanted to be able to dance at the wedding."

Ray got up and went to the back. He walked out holding a small radio. He

turned to a station and turned up the volume a bit, only enough so they could hear, not enough to fill the room.

"You owe me a dance," he said.

He walked over to Rebecca. She stood up and they held each other, barely moving. The music keeping them in place.

The music played on. Rebecca held on tightly, grabbing Ray's shirt at the back. A tear ran down her face.

They held each other as the song ended. Neither wanted to let go. Rebecca finally backed away, but she kept one hand on Ray. She held his forearm, around the Jolly Roger. They stared at each other each wishing the other would say something, but neither wanting to be the one to do so. After a few moments Rebecca let go and walked out the door. Ray didn't move, watching her until she was out of sight and then staring at where he last saw her. In her place out of the window was an old trading card store, blocked slightly by a traffic pole and the signs in the median of Armistice. Ray blinked and a van stopped at the traffic light. He walked to the back and rolled the dollar bill back up.

Niagra Power
by Dong Li

BONFIRE

by Courtney Dorsey

I envisioned that night with friends, surrounded,
the darkness looming behind the blazing fire.
These faces I knew left me dumbfounded
aching to be noticed and desired.
The cold grew fierce as my emptiness burned
picked up my acoustic, I dreaded each note
when the riff came to me their heads I turned
delighted I was with the song I just wrote.

Realization set in as the fire grew dim
this was not my pleasure, my longing, my call.
My fingers stopped plucking the air was grim
no longer on top my ego took a fall.
Packed my belongings, no need to farewell
for I was a ghost, with no story to tell.

Kiss

by Joseph Frederick

Imagination in Silhouette
by Margaret Cooksey

Butterfly
by Jihee Kang

Calliope Second Prize 2009, Art

Woods - Folk Symphony
by Andrew Bieber

Sleeping Mint
by Bill Froberg

FOR BETTER OR WORSE

by David J. McGraw

The charter boat glides effortlessly across the turquoise water of the lagoon as we are transported to our bungalow. Leaning over the side of the boat, I see fish darting in and out along the reef. The white sand of the ocean floor shines like a satin sheet ten feet below me. The remnants of an extinct volcano at the center of the island tower over us. Janet, my new bride, looks over at me and I can tell how excited she is to be here; I don't think I've closed my mouth since our plane landed. Seven days in Bora Bora…how did that happen?

Our bungalow faces Mt. Otemanu and sits over the lagoon. The water beneath us is four feet deep and gradually deepens as you swim toward the mountain. I cannot get over the color of this water, I have never seen anything like it. Janet asks me if I want to go for a swim and by the time she is done with her question, I've already jumped in. The sky is bright blue except for some scattered clouds on the horizon. The warmth of the water is refreshing. It's winter in the Southern Hemisphere, but at 85 degrees, you wouldn't know it.

We swim for ten minutes, take in our surroundings, and enjoy the paradise we're lucky enough to inhabit. I drop underwater and start to swim, seeing how far I can go as my body skims over the ocean floor. During one of my underwater strokes I feel a tug on my finger and realize that my wedding ring has slid off. I see it falling through the water toward the sand and, in what feels like slow motion, I fully extend my arm and lunge underwater toward the ring. The attempt is hardly successful as the ring bounces off my hand, careening toward the pure white sand floor. I immediately stop moving and pop my head out of the water. "Oh S***!" I yell. Thankfully I can see the floor of the lagoon because the water is so clear. As I am looking for a small, shiny circle in the sand, Janet, who is swimming about twenty feet in front of me, calls out.

"What happened?"

"Um….my ring fell off. I can't find it," I timidly exclaim.

"What?!?!?! Are you kidding me?"

I can see the panic on her face, the shock of realizing what has happened slowly showing.

"No, I was swimming and it just slid off my finger while I was underwater."

"Ok, don't move."

She swims over to me. I haven't moved my feet since I came up out of the water. We look around my feet in the area where I think the ring landed. The water is clear to the bottom but the reflection of the sun onto the sand illuminates the sea floor, making it impossible to tell the two apart. After five minutes I

suggest getting some snorkel gear from the activities desk next to the infinity pool. Janet takes my spot in the water while I run to the desk to get the gear.

I climb up the ladder onto the sundeck, quickly dry myself off and grab my sandals. As I jog along the wooden pier toward the beach I can't help but feel like I've disappointed my wife. I've had my wedding ring for four days and now it's gone, lost forever in the lagoon. My mind is racing. Have I ever heard of anyone finding a ring lost in the ocean? Have I ever heard of anyone this stupid?

I reach the activities desk and calmly ask for a snorkel and goggles. I sign my name on the checkout sheet and promise to return them by 7 pm. The sound of sandals flapping against my feet echoes along the pier as I make my way back to the water. As I walk down the steps to the sundeck, I hold up the snorkel gear and triumphantly exclaim, "I got it!"

"Did you get a set for me?" Janet asks inquisitively.

My arms slowly fall to my sides as I realize my shortsightedness. I call myself an idiot and throw out the goggles to her. It takes another 5 minutes to run back to the activities desk. On arrival I nonchalantly request a set of snorkel gear as if this is my first trip there today. The employee behind the desk realizes what I've done and plays along, laughing at the ridiculous predicament I'm in. I grab the second set of goggles and race back to the water.

We scan the bottom of the lagoon for what feels like hours. In reality, it's only been 45 minutes of swimming back and forth along the sand floor looking for my ring. The goggles make the sand floor crystal clear, but the only things that I see are five sea cucumbers and a handful of exotic looking fish. As much as I don't want to give up, morale is low right now and I suggest calling it a day. We return the snorkel gear and let the concierge at the front desk know about the missing ring if anyone happens to find it. He tries to raise my spirits by assuring me that I'm not the first person this has happened to. I don't bother asking him if any of the other guys who lost their rings were successful in retrieving them from the water. I already know the answer. I politely nod my head in response and notice the look of despair in my wife's eyes.

That night I resigned myself to the fact that I was going to have to shell out a couple hundred bucks on a new ring. Janet, on the other hand, was still trying to accept the fact that I had lost the personally engraved wedding ring we spent three months picking out. But we agreed not to let this mishap ruin our honeymoon.

Two days later we decide to get the snorkeling gear again, but this time to enjoy the exotic marine life the lagoon had to offer. We swim out toward the mountain, counting the fish we saw while I tried to see how long I could walk on my hands. After an hour of fooling around in the water, I propose heading in for lunch. On the swim back to our bungalow, Janet sees something sparkling

beneath her and plunges down to the bottom floor to pick it out of the sand. I am wondering what sea creature has caught her attention. Seconds later she jumps out of the water with her hand in the air.

"I got it!" she cries out.

"What?!" I ask. It takes me a couple seconds to realize what is happening. Did she actually find my ring? Has the impossible become possible? I finally take notice of the silver circle shining brightly between the index finger and thumb of her left hand. She has my found my ring in the middle of the lagoon two days after it disappeared from my finger. I am ecstatic! I feel like I did Christmas morning when I was five and saw Optimus Prime for the first time.

"How did you …?" I can't find the words to show the sense of relief I am feeling. I hug her tightly, not letting go, not wanting her to slip through my fingers. I feel a sense of redemption, as if an essential part of my body has been returned to me. Now I am complete.

Reflection in Four Mile Run
by Margaret Cooksey

IN A HOSPITAL ROOM

by Ann Cavazos Chen

In a hospital room
Fourteen years ago
I held my breath

You took your first

In a hospital room
Fourteen years later
I hold my breath
Your chest rises and falls

I watched you emerge from your aquatic life
Determined to crawl up life's beach
Slick back skin purple wet from arrival

Solitary wail as pink erupted across your body

I keep the vigil as you sleep
To balance your pain and fear
Keeping secret the knowledge of mortality
As you dream of mastering your life

Kenmore Stairway
by Lisa Marie Borges

A MOMENT IN THE SANDBOX

by Dave Kelly

Calliope 1st Prize 2009, Literary Submissions

"Kelly… fuckin… you're up," SSgt Moses (or Sgt. Mo as we call him) says in a thick island drawl. Even after six years, he still trips over his English vocabulary. His dark islander skin is still developing a strange tan line around where his sunglasses remain. Even being from Micronesia cannot spare him that embarrassment.

A stocky man with an undying upbeat manner, he tries to keep up with the rest of us in our daily banter about everyone's shortcomings, but ultimately resolves to sit back and just laugh, flashing a large toothy grin. Apparently, being in the Army has taught him that if he can't think of the right word on the spot, "fuckin" is a reasonable way to buy the time he needs. Thus, this is always the most used word in his vocabulary.

I reluctantly put my Kevlar back on my head and begin to make my way onto the bridge, leaving the safety of the shade from the camouflage netting covering our small over-watch position and entering the sweltering dry heat of the summer, desert sun.

"Fuck, it's hot today!" Sgt. Rodriguez, or Rod, says with a grin as he passes me on his way back to the shade. Rod is a short Hispanic with a vibrant, sometimes over-spoken personality. "This shit is all yours now," he says with an air of seriousness, "Keep an eye on some of these cars. I have seen a couple of them drive past a few times."

"Will do," I say nonchalantly, but remembering the VBIED (vehicle borne improvised explosive device… or car bomb) that had struck an Iraqi patrol a few days earlier, only half a mile from our position. I can still see the remnants of the attack as I scan the north side of the horizon. All that remains is a charred chassis of an SUV and blackened sand and road. As I look over it I recall how wildly the untrained Iraqi soldiers had fired their rifles after the explosion, sending stray bullets whistling around us. Needless to say, I begin to stand a little lower behind the guardrail of the bridge.

Hours pass in a long, monotonous fashion. The crackle of the radio is the only contact the four of us have with the rest of the world. For now everything is seemingly calm as no major incidents are being reported. As time drags on, everyone starts anxiously listening to hear our patrol leaving the base. It has been six hours since the last one came by to deliver fresh ice and water for us and our supply is running as thin as our patience.

"Man… Those motherfuckers probably forgot that shit again," Rod says with a tinge of disdain and disappointment.

"At least we get to go back in tonight though," PFC Yokeley says with his light, overly nice manner and southern accent.

My muscles burn as if being seared over an open flame. The body armor presses down on my chest and in the already scorching heat, makes it harder to breath. If not for my trusty lanyard, my weapon would have been on the ground hours ago. Sweat pours into my eyes from my already soaked headband in my Kevlar. It stings as it rounds the corners of them, my frustration peaking as I have nothing dry to wipe them with. I must stay alert through it. I must be cautious and not waiver in my responsibilities to the rest of the guys on the bridge.

As I stand watch, drifting thoughts revolve around the many events that led to being in Iraq, accompanied by dashing glimpses of what I thought my family and friends were doing at that same moment, memories of my last leave and the goodbyes that ensued, and all of them leading to the questions of what may come. All of these things taking no longer then a second to process as I watch the traffic flow beneath me, an intermittent stream of rusted tankers and cars that should have been put to rest long ago.

While watching the traffic pass beneath me, I turn around just in time to see a gigantic plume of swirling sand stretching no less than a half mile into the crisp blue sky, a thermal tornado of sand threatening to wash over us in an instant.

"Hey guys! Heads up!" I yell, pointing behind them at the looming discomfort about to occur.

"Oh shit! What the…fuck," Sgt. Mo says with a small chuckle as he ducks into the Humvee for cover.

Yokeley and Rod duck against the barricade to avoid direct hits, as I can only resolve to turn my back against the onslaught of sand. Only a small amount of pain is spared as sand is whipped onto the back of my neck and the sides of my face. It mixes with my sweat and turns my skin into sandpaper.

"Goddamnit! Yokeley, you are totally up next and I hope you get a bigger one!" I yell only half jokingly, as I wash myself off.

Yokeley and Rod laugh at my discomfort and begin to crack jokes at Sgt. Mo for his abandonment.

"Where'd you go, Sgt. Mo? The sand too much for yah?" Rod quips.

"See what had happened was… that the sand was level 5 and Sgt. Mo is only level 4, thus he was in a losing engagement," Yokeley says nasally, in his best super-nerd voice.

My attention is drawn away from the traffic as I watch the interaction unfold and begin to become impatient about being relieved to the shade.

"Hey Sgt. Mo… isn't it about that time?" I ask, knowing the answer should be "yes."

"Just stay out there until the patrol gets here. I just heard them on the radio, they are on their way," he replied.

Damnit! I think to myself, another twenty minutes of being miserable.

I turn my attention back to the highway and see an Iraqi convoy nearing the underpass. I take little notice to the long line of trucks carrying fresh recruits for the Iraqi police force. It remains just another sight in a long list of regular occurrences, so I turn to face the direction it is heading. As I do, I notice almost immediately a white station wagon driving erratically and gaining speed. Alarms trigger in my head. Something is very wrong with this car. Most cars slow down or even stop as a patrol nears, so they won't draw the wrong attention of rightfully paranoid patrol gunners.

Time seems to slow down as my mind rushes through the rules of engagement. At what point do I shoot the warning shot? When do I shoot to kill? Is he really a threat?

The driver seems to feel my hesitation and answers all of my questions for me as he swerves across the median directly into the path of the convoy. The lead truck's gunner begins to fire his AK-47 toward the station wagon. The loud, distinct cracking of the .240 caliber rounds fills the air. My hesitation dissipates into a crisp level of clarity as adrenaline fills my blood. My M-4 carbine lifts to my shoulder in a smooth arc from my hip. I take aim, putting my cross hairs on the hood of the car just below where the driver is sitting, a way of compensating for the movement of the vehicle. My breathing slows to control my shot cycling. I take a slow inhale…hold it… my fingers squeeze around the grip of the rifle and a quick pop is released. My shoulder takes the recoil as it has many times before and my aim is not diminished. I exhale… hold it…another pop. Sweat is knocked from my brow and I can taste it as it hits my lips.

Sgt. Mo and the others are on their feet now and rushing to take fire on the vehicle, their weapons quickly adding to the symphony of gunfire, a chorus of rhythmic cracks and pops.

I can now faintly make out the silhouette of the driver, a convulsing shadow beneath shattering glass, as I continue to squeeze one round after another into the windshield of the car. Everyone else seems to shoot towards the tires, the hood, or anywhere else to avoid the inevitable, whether on purpose or from lack of concentration. My rounds are flying true, though. My rounds are finding their mark. Just as we had been relentlessly trained, I am finding my target.

The convoy screeches to a halt on one side of the bridge, while on the other side the vehicle veers at high speed off the road and slams into a steep wall of sand. A few lone shots from the shaken Iraqis make the final notes of the song.

As the crack of gunfire ceases, with the station wagon embedded firmly in the side of the embankment, flames begin to slowly seep from the undercarriage. Through my binoculars, I can see the bullet riddled corpse of the insurgent, splayed in a most unnatural position. His head slumped between the two front seats, his arms cocked and mangled behind him. No movement, just an eerie still that seeps into my skin. A chilling realization of what has just happened creeps into my mind. With adrenaline surging through my veins, my muscles still tense, the moment remains seemingly frozen.

The flames begin to rise faster as more gasoline pours from the pierced gas tank. We all watch from the bridge with anxiety and nervousness. Our faces all screaming in silence the same question, "Is this all or is there more coming?"

Suddenly, the rear end of the car explodes with a sharp and distinct roar. Shrapnel shooting from the car pelts our fortifications and everyone ducks as if a great weight has been thrown on our backs without warning.

We all stand and see the station wagon is now completely engulfed in flames, the frame and roof beginning to sag in the intense heat. A small, wafting breeze brings the stench of burning metal and flesh to our nostrils. It overwhelms my senses and I become aware of everyone else still standing on the bridge.

"Hey, Sgt. Mo… you want me to call that up?" I ask with urgency. I know this won't slow anything down and we need to just get back to watching our surroundings.

"No, I got it. Just keep giving them security. They gonna have to fuckin secure that shit and pull it farther from the road now." He says as he walks over to the radio, which is already screaming for an update. He grabs the hand mic and begins his report, "Alpha 66… this is OP 505, Sit-rep follows…"

Months have now passed since that day and I breathe a sigh of relief as I pass through the first customs checkpoint at Dulles International Airport, just outside of Washington, DC. I feel as nervously excited as a young boy picking up his first date, causing my mind to race through the possible scenarios of my homecoming. Will anyone be here to meet me? If there is, will they ask about Iraq? What do I tell them? What will I do now? All of these questions are quickly discarded from my thoughts as they are replaced by more immediate concerns such as, "Where are my damn bags?"

It seems like an eternity before my bags make their way around the turnstile and I grab them. I then make my way to the final customs station. I hand the customs agent my military discharge orders and declaration forms and he glances over the documents. A quick once over is given and then followed by words I have wanted to hear since being stationed in Germany three years prior.

"Welcome back, Specialist Kelly," the customs agent says to me with a smile.

I walk down the long, narrow corridor which separates the customs area from the arrival gates. The dim, fluorescent lights overhead are casting glancing shadows on the pale walls. Step by step, I walk towards the dark, glass door at the end of the hall. I walk towards the unknown, just as I did when I boarded the plane which was bound for Iraq. My heart is throbbing in my chest as I open the door. I step through into a cheering crowd and into a new, unfamiliar world.

The Media Hook
by Linda King

THE EVOLUTION OF ART

by Izzi Angel

Our whispering darkroom kisses
occupy the tiny closet we converted
to hide in together.

Imagine no religion:
Sparkling washes enchant your canvas
while I spin words into ink and echo
raucous musical protests in the elegance of your neck.

Future studio kisses
drenched in bright diffusions of unrefracted rainbows
keep my legs spinning
to pedal our tandem life to the top of the hill.

The Artist and her Work

by Bill Froberg

FREE RADICAL

by Brian McCracken

I was 15
when I saw a man leap
from a fire breathing tragedy
so he wouldn't be
burned alive. Two towers fell and white doves died.
That night
I hugged my pillow and cried.

The War started when I was 17.
36 million marched in 600 cities
streets I couldn't see. Protests that
made history, but from my couch
I watched payloads
drop on Baghdad while tears
dropped from my father's eyes.
If we can't have peace let us fantasize.

Mile high stealth bombers drop
smart bombs who are really just
uneducated duds and dunces.
They fall on little children who are little
more than little black dots
superimposed on a night vision green screen
victims lacking faces
censored like the black bars over
criminal faces on COPS and co-ed
breasts on Girl's Gone Wild. War is hell, and
the revolution will be televised on pay per view.

We drink misinformation from coca cola cups and CNN,
while embedded journalists lie in bed with
war profiteers, and preach the gospel of
flags and tunnel vision. This country put a tourniquet on
diplomacy. Now we bleed revenge in red, white, and blue.
Fox News and retired generals talk about video game wars
and how exactly cluster bombs work. Would
a doctor explain it differently? Our
indifference just may go down in history.

Our masters play Russian Roulette with phrases like:
"The war on terror, poverty, and drugs,"
forgetting that hate and extremism grow in the sands of poverty.
Gaza, Kabul and Fallujah. This year's crop
is smaller and younger and has a million reasons to hate me and you.
Afghanistan tells me opium exports are up too.

21 found me an unwelcome guest of
red elephants holding their electoral spectacle
in a sold out stadium. The Republican National Convention beckoned...

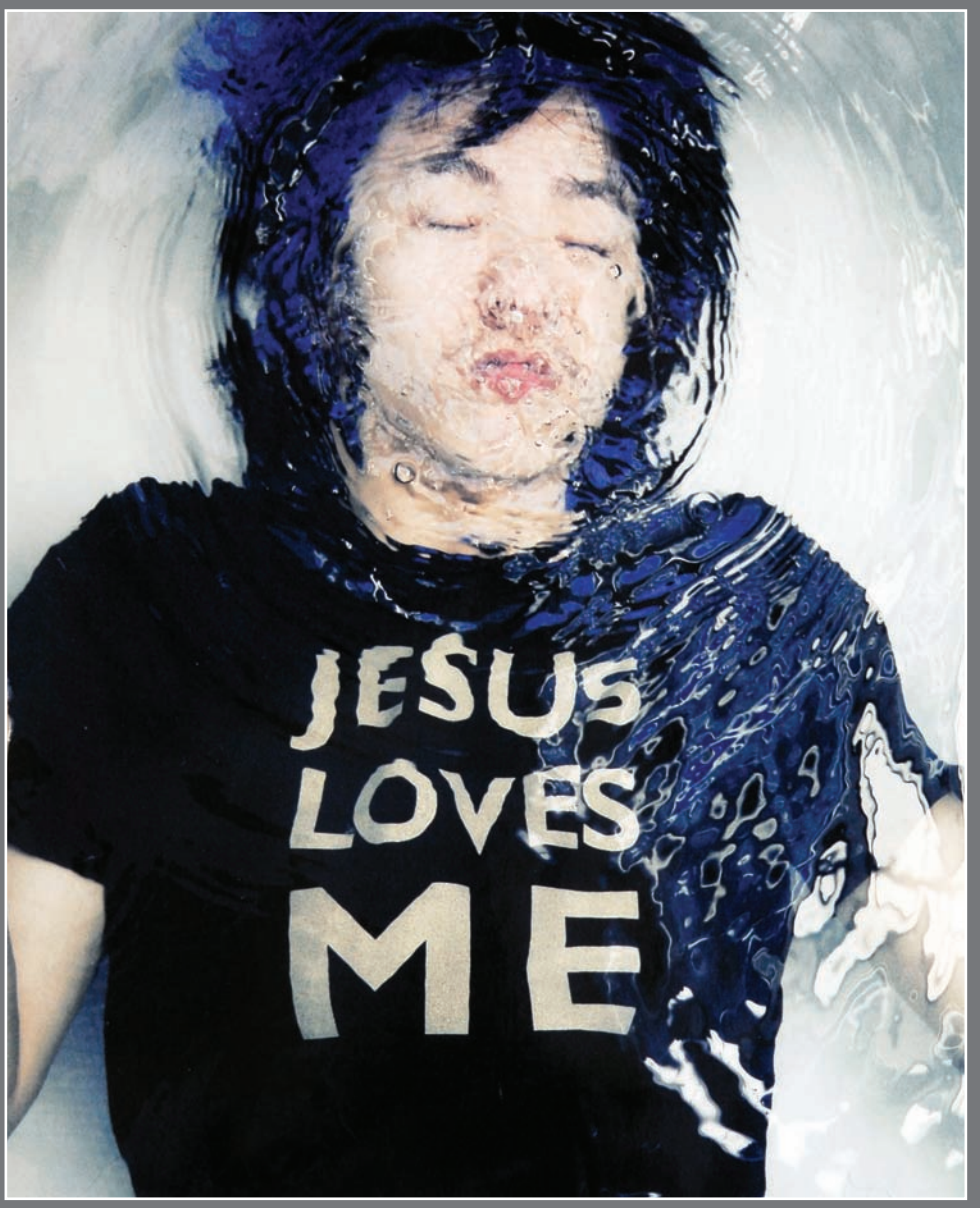
The Xcel Center an iron citadel
guarded by raped civil liberties
disguised as merely law and order the fuse of
revolution grows shorter and shorter
and I am not alone.

Beautiful black clad anarchists and me
locked at elbows we refuse to leave
Storm troopers in black claim to
keep the peace, but leg long
batons and gas masks speak volumes to me
So we dance. They fire cascading volleys of
concussion grenades and tear gas canisters which
send whispers to deter determination and liberation

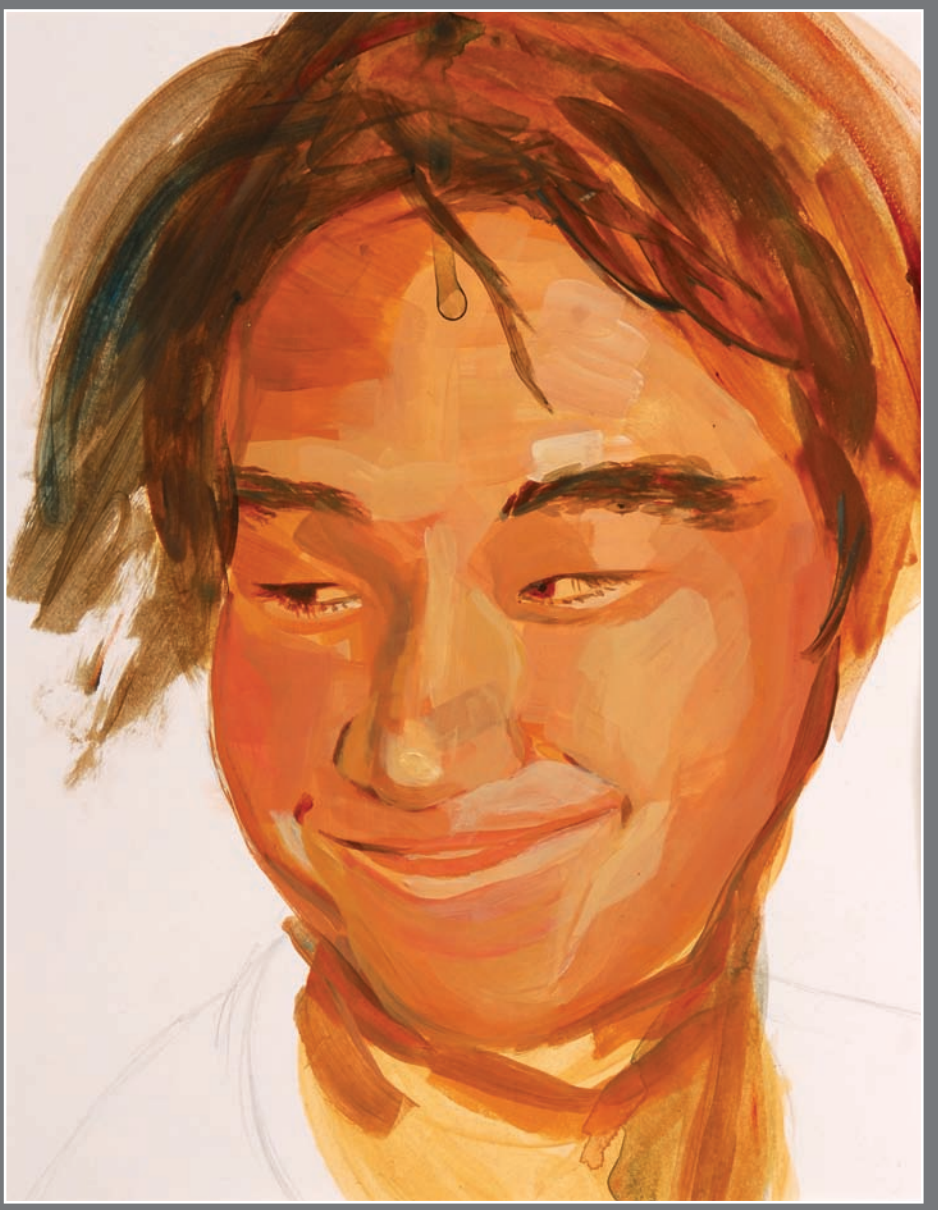
We won't stand by for tyranny.
We challenge the law out of necessity saying,
"Your wars are waged without our consent,
and we the young do hereby dissent!"

We flip two headed quarters
in this land of the free
sighing and saying,
"at least we live in a democracy."
and in this generation of iPods and apathy
we are treasures. We are gold. Our votes will not
be bought or sold, because the war mongers
and their bumper stickers were right.

Freedom isn't free

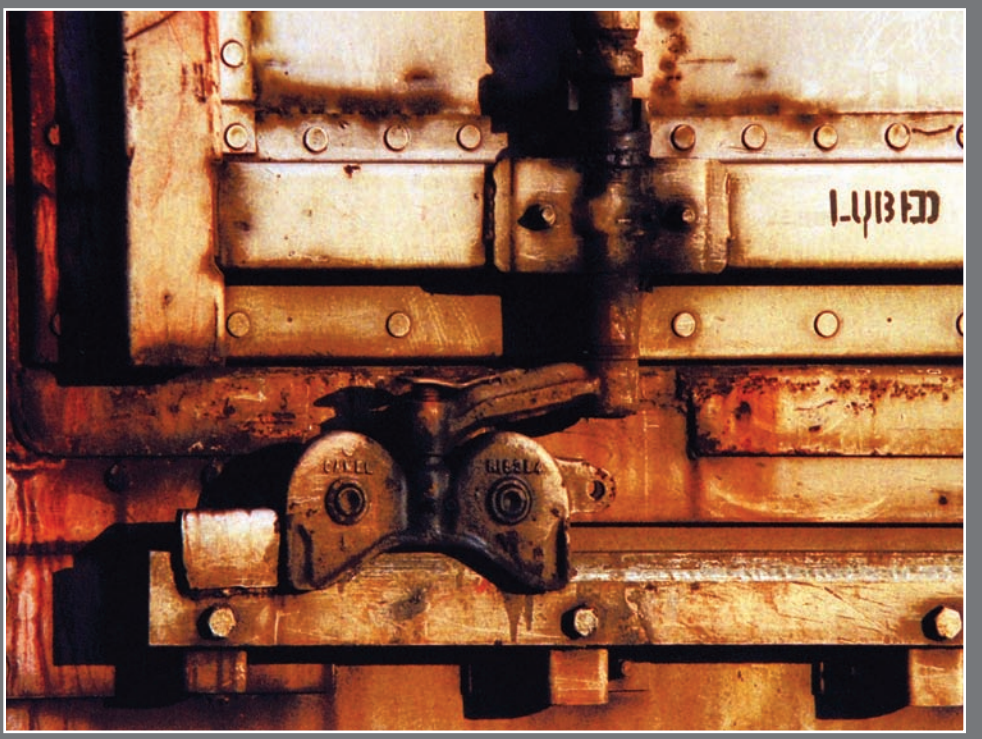


Jesus Loves Me
by Jaewon Choi



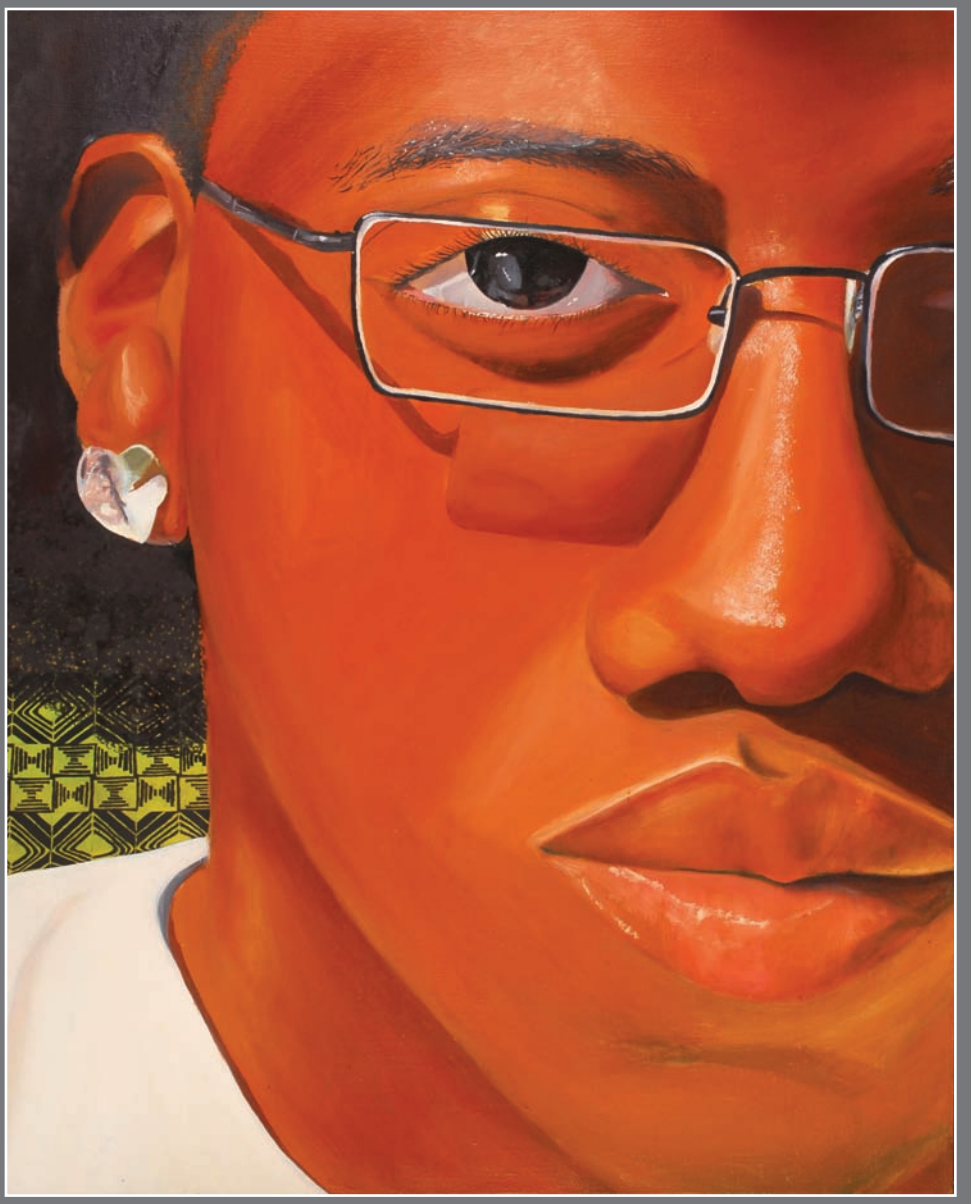
Untitled
by Sung Suh

Raining
by Jaewon Choi



Lubed
by Bill Froberg

Self Portrait
by Yoon-Mi Park



Proud to be Me
by Curtis Newkirk

Nightmare
by Jorge Vasquez

Untitled
by Courtney Wheeler

Calliope Third Prize 2009, Art

We Hearken Backwards
by Gwinn Ward

TAZRIA'S ROOM

by Rebecca Phillips

Downy birds
Rustle and chirp from
The window

Where curtains
Flushed with light, shimmer like
Sunset waves

Rising up
With smoky spices pricking
The cool air,

Teasing pleasures
Rich and salty, like the moist warmth
Of that bed—

Stained, deep cherry-oak red,
With the soft kiss of
Silken sheets.

ON ADDICTION

by Andrew Sherwood

I watch too much TV It's a problem (so I'm told). Recently, I tried watching an episode of Sober House on Vh1, but I just couldn't bring myself to actually watch it. It's not that I have a problem with people exploiting themselves at their lowest point (generally, I find that some of the best entertainment possible), but rather the tone of the show, its overall preachiness, that bothers me.

Now, I make no claims to be an addiction specialist or any other kind of medical authority, but I do make claims to at least have some common sense in my head.

The problem with the tone of the show comes from my own feelings on the definition of addictions and the extremes that they are taken to seemingly only to scare people into thinking they are derelict addicts and the dregs of society for having a beer. Due to youthful indiscretions, I became (read: was forced to become) familiar with some of the definitions of and tests to see if you have an addiction and it was nothing but confounding.

An example of a test for alcoholism is asking questions such as: Do you ever have more than one drink at a time? Do you drink often? Daily? Do you ever feel the need to drink? Now, innocuous as these questions may seem, they are in direct contradiction to the medically recommended intake of alcohol. There are numerous studies that show, for men, some for women, having one to two glasses of red wine or beer a day is actually good for cardiac health. While it may seem that the questions are not asked for health reasons, but the people who come up with these questions aren't looking only for extreme answers, any answer of yes suggests that a person more likely than not has an alcohol addiction, according to so-called "addiction specialists" like Dr. Drew of Sober House.

This is the problem I have seen in my experience and my own curious research about addictions. The standards of what constitutes an addiction are twisted from actual medical evidence. Yes, excessive use of a substance or incorrect use of a substance will cause medical problems, and those people who do abuse any substance need to take a look in the mirror. But, there is a big difference between use and abuse, and that is what cutaways or side stories in this kind of programming do not address, nor is it addressed by any "addiction specialist" in any classroom forum. I am not an alcoholic because I'm 24 and go to a bar on Fridays. Were that sentence written "I am 24 and go to the bar at Friday's because it's five o'clock somewhere," it would be a red flag.

Again, I am not discounting addiction treatment for those who need it. My problem is the puritan sanctimonious attitude taken towards addiction on a

whole, the need to accuse all those who make mistakes or make use of a substance as horrible people.

It's not just alcohol that this attitude is taken towards. People feel the need to educate others constantly about tobacco, usually the educators are not themselves users. When I take that first glorious puff of a cigarette I do not need a friend to say, "Do you know what's in that?" or "That's going to kill you, you know?" I do know because I sat next to you in health class, now go away.

The overall tone towards any kind of use is condescending. It's counter-productive. And it's not the tone that recovering addicts use. On shows like Sober House or any interview with a musician alive between 1960 and 1980, the attitude of the former addict is not condescending or sanctimony, it's serious. Former addicts speak seriously about addiction and about serious warning signs because it's the truth of their lives. They are not trying to scare housewives who enjoy wine with dinner or young adults who are acting like young adults have since the beginning of time into thinking that they are bad people and are going to die within a year. Mostly because it's not true for the average person.

People are going to use controlled substances. They always will, for the rest of human existence. And they will because, truthfully, controlled substances are fun. It's a fact that people rarely like to admit, but it's a fact. The problem with addiction treatment and education is that it's not handled by people who realize that it's fun. It's run by people who rarely, if ever, use, let alone have ever abused. It's run by people whose only addiction is cross-stitch pictures of kittens wearing Easter bonnets. It's run by people who view themselves as better morally, personally, and just generally than those they claim to be trying to help. It's run by people who don't know what use or abuse or addiction means.

And that's the problem.

THE TINKU DANCER

by Daynee Rosales

Juan wanted to be seen. Always self-conscious and reserved, he signed up to dance in this year's Carnaval festivities, hoping that his hidden talents would emerge under the pressures of an audience. "I don't know what it is, but you have something," his troupe leader, Luis, told him, and consequently moved him to the front of the line, bumping down quite a number of seasoned veterans. "Remember," Luis said, "the Tinku is not so much about skill, but about afición. And aggression." Juan knew he lacked the skill many of the other dancers possessed, and wanted very much to be a part of the Entrada, but unlike his leader, he was still not convinced he was ready for the procession.

"Juan, this is not just a dance. You've heard the stories, where the dance came from, no?" Luis must've felt Juan's empty stare, so he went on. "Wow, man. I knew you were from the city, but I thought you knew at least something about your people. Let me tell ya, it's intense. Once a year, those Indian campesinos in Potosi fight one-on-one matches. Man against man, woman against woman."

"Why?"

"Depends. Usually, the winning side gets a prosperous year."

Juan tried to make sense of this, but could still not comprehend how anyone would fight this way. The very idea of punching someone brought pain to his fist. It was barbaric. Luis laughed and pointed towards a drink stand outside a restaurant. "You need some Chicha," he said, referring to the bowl of fermented maize a woman was selling, "let's drink and talk. Then you'll be ready to dance. If you're still freaking out on me after that, I'm gonna have to bump you back to the end of the line."

The February sun was bright in mid afternoon and the crowds started filling up the nearby restaurants and sidewalks to catch a glimpse of the performers in El Carnaval. Families and friends shared food and drink, waiting for it all to begin. There were going to be dancers all week, but the biggest events happened on the Sunday before Ash Wednesday, the first day of Lent. Like many others, Juan had been practicing with his group for months, and today they were to dance all day long, until they've swept through every corner of every street in town. Luis called everyone in formation, and Juan stepped forward in full costume; made with wild color schemes of yellow, red, orange, brown, and green, all knitted in patterns. He tied a long scarf to his waist and checked that his leather sandals were strapped before putting his bowl-shaped hat in place. He was ready.

Sweat rushed down his back. Adrenaline and nerves finally kicked in. The

smell of alcohol from the street vendors flooded his senses. He looked to his leader and the musicians for their signal. The instruments played their first note. He stepped forward in unison with all the other dancers as the drums started their familiar rhythm, heavy on the first beat. The Tinku dancers moved as one, with most of their strength on their steps. They danced leaning forward, like lions on the prowl, and stepped left to right, four beats apiece, before moving forward once more. The pipes and the guitars moved fast up and down the scale, always anticipating their next note. A slight echo in their playing haunted the melody, causing Juan's anxiety to escalate.

He had to keep it together. He had to maintain his spot up front, or all these months of effort would've gone to waste. After a few blocks of watching the audiences enjoy his performance, Juan slowly let himself go, allowing himself to swing his hips side to side, and fling his arms back and forth, as if warding off opponents. He followed the rehearsed routine, doing a windmill to push himself through the streets like a tiny hurricane. Juan's arms spread out to his side, claiming his space, and grounded his feet, anticipating Luis' signal to do a full stop. Every few blocks they had to settle in place and dance for the audiences. Odd-numbered lines would turn around and face the line standing right behind them and simulate a battle. Organized chaos, Luis called it.

Arranged in ten lines of seven people each, Juan found himself front and center. With the signal, he moved forward and swung his fist, his partner ducked, stood up, and repeated the motion. They circled each other with their arms carefully spread out. They took their hats off and hit them against the ground, then raised them to the heavens, and attacked. After improvising a short fight, the partners spun back to place. They continued the Tinku as a group once more.

Juan's fighting partner whispered to him from behind, "You think you're something else, don't ya?" Juan continued to dance. "You know, you took my spot," the man said a little louder, "I've been dancing here for seven years, and you took my spot."

"It's too late to change anything now," Juan replied, "maybe you'll be up front next year."

"No," he said, "we're switching. Right now." The man grabbed Juan by his clothes and pulled him back to the second line, then rotated himself into front center. Luis whistled for the troupe to start moving forward again, and everyone gave a battle cry and danced on to the next block. Audiences on the sidewalks clapped and welcomed the other groups following the Tinkus. A group of men carried a statue of The Virgin Maria of the Socabon around for veneration, and the people threw confetti at her, asking for blessings. Men dressed as devils danced alongside the Virgin, pushing the Tinkus almost completely out of sight,

but still interlacing the threads of indigenous myths and deities with Spanish Catholicism.

Juan could not look back. He stared at his opponent now up in the front row. He tried not to react, but could not ignore his fellow troupe members staring at him. You're a coward, their eyes said. Fight back, you coward.

The word "tinku" means encounter.

Arms up, feet strong, Juan felt something build up. He could no longer dance leaning down, so he stood upright, head high, the strength from his feet escalading to his shoulders. After a few blocks, it was time to stop and, once more, perform for the public. He was ready. He tried to wait for his opponent to turn around, but could no longer wait. Juan dove into attack, head first, knocking the man to the ground. His mind went back to earlier that day, as Luis tried to calm Juan's anxieties over some chicha.

The Tinku will never really be a dance.

Juan and his opponent rolled around on the ground, each refusing to let go.

It is here, it is now.

When he finally managed to free one of his hands, Juan punched the man in the face with all the strength he could muster.

It's how our people settle things.

Blood trickled down the opponent's nose. A sudden fury erupted in his eyes as he grabbed for Juan's neck. A circle formed around them both. Men, women, and children called to them, "FIGHT, FIGHT, FIGHT, FIGHT!!"

It's our culture.

Juan kicked, trying to release himself, and gasped for air as he was being choked. Members of the troupe picked sides and broke into small fights with one another.

It's for friendship.

Scalpers took bets. Most of the public cheered. Some of the children cried. The women tried not to watch or get involved.

It's for blood.

Luis stepped in to help Juan, trying to free him from his attacker's hands. After he was let go, it was still hard for him to breathe. Lying on the ground with his arms spread out wide, he could not move from the pain, but could still hear his attacker screaming and cussing in his direction. Juan's eyesight got blurry, his mind side-stepped as the crowds cheered for or against him, and he pictured the people raising him as a hero and parading him like the Virgin, or maybe ganging up on him, trying to bleed him to death. Either would do.

SAMMY

by Chandra Latson

She should've called by now.

Nervously, I stopped typing, and glanced once more at my phone. The thought that I gave her the wrong number crossed my mind again, the same way it had every time I looked over at my silent cell for the past few hours. There was no way I had given her the wrong number.

It was all planned out. The note was neat. There was no one in the hallway. I had folded it, still big, so that it was noticeable, and slipped it into her backpack. And yes, it was definitely her backpack – purple with pink hearts all over it. A very girly design, but cute.

It wasn't like she had a messy locker, so she had to have found it. It was one of the things I liked about her—her un-messy locker. Not just her locker, though, I mean the way she was just neat in general. She had to have found the note. I know she did.

I looked over at my phone again. It was possible my battery was dead. Or that I didn't have a signal. Sometimes there were no cell signals in my mom's office.

I jumped up, and ran to the other side of the room. I had put the phone here, so that I wouldn't look at it every five seconds, or check the time, or call anyone else and miss her call because I had yet to master call-waiting and always seemed to hang up on the person I was trying to click over to. But I could text. I could definitely text her. She was always texting in class, so I was pretty sure she'd respond to a text message.

Or I could wait for her to call me. Texting suddenly seemed too direct.

But then again, the note had been pretty straightforward, too.

"Hey Johanna, I know it's probably weird to be getting a note like this from me, since I sit next to you in a lot of classes. That kind of happens when our last names are so close together. Haha. Call me, okay? My number is 565-483-3827. I have something really important I wanted to talk to you about."

And then, of course, I had signed it. The last thing I wanted was to be a Secret Admirer. It wasn't cute to me. In fact, I had always thought of it as kind of stalker-like and creepy.

I could text her... I mean, if I wanted results sooner, which I kind of did because the waiting wasn't fun. It was nerve-wracking, to the extreme.

I had entered her number into my phone a week ago, when I first thought up this plan. So I went to my Contacts List, and scrolled down. There it was: Johanna Thomas, with a star next to it for Important Contact.

I took a deep breath. I supposed I could start with a "hi," which would lead to a "who's this?" which would lead to me putting in my name, and then a lot of hesitation before I pressed Send. That could either lead to her not responding, or her asking, "How did you get my number?"

Or I could just wait for her to call, and have this conversation in real time where I wouldn't be at the mercy of a replying text message. Or wires getting crossed and text messages getting lost. Or sent to the wrong person. Which would lead to... death, probably. By humiliation.

I typed "Hi," and predictably hesitated over pressing send. It was possible that she had gotten my note, and blocked my number. So if I sent this text message, it was entirely possible that I would never get a reply. Ever. And she'd sit next to me in almost all of my classes for the rest of the year, ignoring me, or worse: acting perfectly nice and pretending like it had never happened.

"DO DO DO, DA DA DA, DOODLY DO, DO DO DO!"

I screamed, and jumped about a foot in the air. My. Phone. Was. Ringing.

And it was her.

Briefly I reflected upon how stupid I was. Was I really about to have this conversation? With Johanna? Oh, wow, I was really stupid.

"Hello?" I said, as if I didn't who it was. As if it were a question.

"Hi, this is Johanna. May I speak to Sammy, please?"

"Speaking," I replied, faintly.

"Hey, Sammy, what's up? I got your note." She sounded so happy. And here I was, about to turn her world upside down. For a second, I felt horrible.

"Hi," I said, and then nothing else. There was silence. And breathing. I could hear her breathing. It had to be her because I was pretty sure I wasn't.

"Sammy?" she said, after about twenty seconds of the silence. "You still there? What's going on?"

She was talking to me. On the phone. This... could not happen. This wasn't actually happening.

"I sent you a note," I said, stupidly.

She paused for a second. "I know... that's why I called you back." She was confused, I could tell. I would be, too. More silence. "... Sammy?"

"I..." I didn't know heartbeats could go that fast. "The other day in class... I..."

Silence again. She waited.

I couldn't do this. Who was I kidding? I couldn't do this, especially not on the phone. With her voice so close to my ear.

"My pencil," I said, suddenly. Now I was breathing, and quite heavily at that. I'm sure I sounded like an idiot.

"What?" she asked.

"My pencil, um, the mechanical one. The other day you borrowed it, remember? I was wondering if I...?"

"Your pencil? I'm sorry, did you want it back?"

"I like you!" I blurted out.

"I... what?"

"I'm a girl and I like you and I'm sorry!" I hung up. And dropped the phone. And started hyperventilating.

I wanted to take back everything. I wanted to erase the day, or maybe go back in a time machine to a point where none of this had happened, and stop myself. I wanted to die. I wanted to—

"DO DO DO, DA DA DA, DOODLY DO, DO DO DO!"

She was calling back. I stared at my cell, debating if I should answer or not.

What was the point? There was no way she was going to accept it. Who was I kidding? She'd probably laugh at me, or worse: tell everyone. She was probably calling back right now to say how utterly disgusted she was, and that she was going to move her seat to the other side of the classroom. She would tell me never to talk to her again, or even move my eyes in her direction. What was I thinking? I couldn't handle that kind of rejection, especially not on the phone. It was way too personal.

I stared at the phone. It was still ringing. Should I pick it up, or not?

The answer was obvious.

I shook my head, and I didn't.

PLAY BALL

by Gretchen Gaub

It was a stunning afternoon, nothing but fluffy clouds that resembled softballs in the air with the intense sunlight shining down on us. "What a beautiful day for softball!" my dad said in his announcer voice. As I looked back at him in the crowded stands, I knew he was cheering for me. My dad was always there when I needed that pep talk as I stood in the on deck circle, telling me that I couldn't do it, knowing that those words were exactly what I needed to hear. The moment I am told I can't do something or that I am incapable of doing something is the moment that I make it happen. My dad knew me so well and knew just how to motivate me. As I stepped into the freshly outlined batter's box, with my hands clinched around the aluminum bat, I would give him the outcome he expected, a base hit.

This was the Little League All-Star State Championship game, the Angels versus the White Sox. We were the Angels, and if we won, we were going to be the new Illinois State Champions. This was the moment we had all been working so vigorously to get to. We hoped and prayed that the long, grueling practices were finally going to pay off. We didn't know much about the White Sox, except that the head coach was very obnoxious. He was always yelling and would disagree with every call the umpires made. They must be pretty good if they made to the finals; we have to bring our "A" game, I thought as my hands started to shake.

"Batter up!" the umpire yelled above the crowds. "Play ball!" As the crowd applauded, we were up to bat. The White Sox took the field and the pitcher, with French braids and her hat almost covering her eyes, threw her first few warm-up pitches. Eh, I wasn't too scared as l stared at the ball flying out of her 50 mph underhand pitch. I waited as I watched my first teammate strike out, the second walk, the third get a single. The moment was here, I was up to bat. I put on my red helmet and tightened my batting gloves, and stepped into the batter's box. I glared at the pitcher; I knew I was going to get at least a base hit. First pitch, ball. Second pitch, strike. "1 and 1," the umpire called. I watched the pitcher wind her arm around like a windmill and release. I started my swing and, tinck: the ball soared over the shortstops head. As I stopped on third base, I knew that it would be a close game.

The innings continued with a base hit here and there, when all of a sudden, the time had come. The top of the seventh inning, the inning that could have been our last this season, and we were up to bat, with a tied 3–3 score. I stood in the dugout and cheered to encourage my teammates as loud as I could. I

couldn't even open my eyes and look to watch what was going on, and then we scored. It was all up to defense now as we took the field.

I knew the last inning of this game was going to be the memory that would stick out in my head forever. I was playing right field, not my favorite position, and there was nothing being hit on that side of the field all day. The grass was emerald green and still had the fresh-cut aroma. I stood there ready to win this game as the first batter fielded out at first. The second batter struck out at the plate. The third and final out was all we needed. She stepped into the batter's box and I could see her hands shaking. She swung late and I couldn't quite tell at that moment if it was headed my direction. As I got a better look, I sprinted, running like the wind, and stuck my mitt up in the air behind my head. There it was, the uncatchable ball, and I caught it. I held on to the ball as tight as I could, knowing that this was my moment. We won. We won the championship game.

The crowd roared and I looked directly at my father, as I saw him giving me the "Way to go Gretch" nod. "Angel in the outfield," I heard my coach say. "You are the Angel in the outfield!!" This was the moment that made me realize that this was what I worked so hard for. This was the moment that every player wants to have just once in their career. It was a time to shine, and that's what I did. I was as bright as the intense sunlight shining down on me that day.

Red Koi
by JoAnn Abbott

CELL BLOCK

by Frank Anderson

Calliope 2nd Prize 2009, Literary Submissions

Wake up to the clack clack, the doors unbolt
Chow time, barks the deputy
shouts bounce off the cinderblocks, it's
4 am.
Cold boiled eggs and tasteless grits
over-sweet coffee and if you're lucky,
greasy thick-skinned links with grey gristle
Breakfast tray slides through the slot
shuffle back in shower shoes
roll the egg beneath your palm to
crack the shell

TV blares throughout the day
Someone's always working out, his sweat hangs in
the air-tight room
Cloud of powder suffocates
Another day with twelve strange men
Red bracelets stand for violent crime
White nonviolent, yellow mental
But they all walk down the long corridor
Chained together, to the courtroom

Autumn Festival
by Doan Thuy Thi Lai

Untitled
by Sung Suh

The Hipocrite
by Jorge Vasquez

Lola the Giraffe
by Kelsey Hobar

Submarine Sandwich
by Andrew Brown

POWDER

by Conley Lowrance

Dirty little stairwell for a dirty little—I
sit atop looking down on
the dust and the drinks
littered across faded tiles—record
plays dim, lets surface noise surface
over quiet melodies. Shades drawn
shut—no trickle of light to
slip in and play over the smudged glasses
the bartender sullenly wipes clean. I trace the wood
of the stairs with a finger
tip and feel the splinters sink in—if
you let yourself step inside from off the streets maybe we'd get
lucky and I'd sweep you off your feet
for a dance—for a moment—but
I've never been one to dance.

Boys hold their girls tight—tuck them into
coats to keep them young—the crowds,
if you could name them such, begin
to seep through the cracks of
the door—filling tables and time—I remain
atop the stairs, distant yet
enticed—enthralled by the walls, the way
his jacket collar brushes so slightly
against his chin; the way her pretty
little eyes fixate on her
drink before darting so faithfully
back to his lips. If I could touch such
a world the pressure on my palms
would be enough to kill—to
leave me behind glass
once again as such is the role
God would have written for me
if He any say.

CHECK MYSELF

by Yudai Ishikawa

Calliope 1st Prize 2009, ESL Submissions

When playing Japanese chess, my grandfather used to say, "Victory is how long you can control your emotions." I know that for myself now.

One night during summer vacation in 2008, I learned for the first time how to play chess from my cousin in the United States. He is a 17-year-old American boy. I used to play Japanese chess, so I could easily understand how to play chess. After we practiced a couple of times, we started seriously.

While playing the game, his behavior changed. He often cursed me when I moved my piece to a bad position, or he moved his piece to a bad position. Also, when I moved my piece to a position that he thought was foolish, he said, "You are stupid, huh?" I realized he couldn't control his emotions. I moved my piece to a position that I thought was good, but he returned it to its former place provokingly; he looked at me as if he were despising a monkey. He absolutely thought he would not lose to me!

As soon as he was winning, his words increased. Finally, he checked my king. I moved it to a safe place. He checked again. My king couldn't move anywhere; it was checkmate, and I lost the game. He shouted and then knocked over all of my pieces when he moved his last piece to checkmate. I felt very angry but I didn't show my anger. He was very rude, but he didn't think so. He looked so satisfied. He was still talking to me about something. I ignored the words and waited for him to calm down, imagined that if I said something, he would say more and get more impudent. I acted calmly and politely. I waited, taking time before asking, "Can we play again?"

During the next game, I moved a knight. He moved a pawn. I moved a bishop. He moved a queen. It was a most serious game. I tried to contain my emotions and check myself. I thought, and thought, and thought. I really wanted to win, but if my mind were on winning, I would lose quickly. So, I concentrated on the game. He calmed down. He was also thinking, so we kept silent for a long time. "Check!" I said. Saying nothing, he thought. He moved his king to a place. "Check," I said again. His king couldn't move anywhere. He said nothing. I said nothing, but in my mind I said, "Checkmate." He was still looking at the board. Finally, I just said, "Thank you. I enjoyed the game."

In conclusion, in chess, victory is getting a checkmate. To win, a person checks his opponent's king, but he also must check himself. It is a paradox, but I realized it during the game. I checked my anger and I checked myself, so I could check his king and win. How right my grandfather was! The chess game taught me that victory is being able to check myself.

Jazzband
by Jihee Kang

DADDY'S NEW HOME

by Andrew Sherwood

Momma says that Daddy is moving to a new home. She says that Daddy's not gonna come home anymore. I asked Momma why Daddy can't come home and she said because he can't. Momma said that someone said Daddy couldn't come home with us anymore and that Daddy had to go to a new home.

I said it's not fair. Daddy was sposeta to play baseball with me on the weekends. Daddy said he's gonna teach me to hit the ball far. I like baseball. Daddy tooked me to a game where the Orioles play and I had fun. I got a cotton candy and Daddy let me have a hot dog like a big boy. Daddy got me a hat like the Orioles wear. It was big but Daddy said I would grow into it as I got bigger. We sat in left field. I asked Daddy if we could catch a home run but he said the Orioles aren't good at hitting them. He said that Alex on the other team might hit one, but he didn't. It was still fun.

Momma said that she would take me to a game. I asked her who Alex was, but she didn't know. Momma doesn't like baseball. She can't throw very good. She said she would teach me, but I don't know how 'cause she can't throw good. She said Uncle Ronnie could teach me, but I don't like Uncle Ronnie. He doesn't know Alex either. I don't think he likes baseball.

Momma says that Uncle Ronnie is gonna come over this weekend and he can teach me to play baseball. But Uncle Ronnie likes football. Football's different from baseball. They don't hit a ball in football so I don't know how he's going to teach me to hit the ball far like Daddy said he could. Uncle Ronnie smells like beer. He has a mustache. I don't like that. It tickles when he hugs me. Daddy doesn't have a mustache.

I asked Momma when I could go visit Daddy. Momma said that we can't go visit Daddy for a long time. She said his home is real far away and that we can't go. I said it's not fair. Momma said that we can say goodbye to Daddy this weekend. I asked if he can teach me to hit the ball far like he said he would when we say goodbye. Momma said no. I said it's not fair.

We had to get dressed up to say goodbye to Daddy. I wanted to wear my baseball stuff, but Momma said that I couldn't and Momma said that I had to wear a tie. I don't like wearing a tie. Daddy never made me wear a tie.

We had to go to someone else's home to say goodbye to Daddy. There were a lot of people there saying bye to Daddy. They were all dressed up too. I asked Momma why all the people were there and Momma said that they were gonna miss Daddy too. Uncle Ronnie came and gave me a hug and said he was gonna sit down with me. He didn't smell like beer.

When we got in the house Daddy wasn't there. There was a fancy box sitting at the front. Momma said that's where Daddy was. Momma said it was Daddy's new bed. I asked why Daddy was sleeping and Momma said that he needed his rest. Daddy had fallen down at work. He works on buildings with metal. I said it wasn't fair.

I asked Momma if I could wake Daddy up. She said no and that Daddy had to rest. There were a bunch of flowers around Daddy's bed. Daddy never liked flowers. I didn't know why they would give Daddy a bed with flowers because he didn't like flowers. I was mad at them for giving Daddy that bed. Daddy should be in a baseball bed. Daddy liked baseball not flowers.

Momma started crying. I asked her why and she said she was gonna miss Daddy. I asked why he can't come home and Momma said she didn't know. The other grown-ups were crying too. I asked Momma why they were crying. Momma said that they were gonna miss Daddy too. I asked how come? I didn't know any of the grown-ups there so how come they're gonna miss Daddy? Momma said they were Daddy's friends.

Uncle Ronnie got up from sitting with us. He went by Daddy's bed and started talking about Daddy. He said that when they were little boys no one thought Daddy would be the first to say goodbye. But Daddy didn't say goodbye. I was mad at Daddy. Why wouldn't he say goodbye? He promised me he would teach me to hit the ball far, but then Momma said he got a new home. I said it's not fair.

After Uncle Ronnie was done talking a bunch of guys picked Daddy's bed up and carried Daddy out of the house. I asked Momma if I could help but Momma said no. Momma said I wasn't allowed to go with Daddy. I asked when I could go visit Daddy and Momma said I had to wait my turn. I was mad at Momma. She held my hand and didn't let go and didn't let me say bye to Daddy. I asked when it was my turn and why those guys got a turn before I did 'cause he was my Daddy not theirs. Momma said I wouldn't get a turn until I was a big boy. But when I learned to use the potty they said I was already a big boy and Daddy let me have a hot dog at the baseball game because I was a big boy. I said I wanted to go with Daddy but Momma said no again. I said it's not fair.

A DOUBT

by Jisook Choi

Calliope Honorable Mention 2009, Literary Submissions

"No, No, No! I want to get out of here", I screamed loudly. I was in a prison with horrible big criminals. I really did not know why I was there. They looked at me with amused scorn. I always ran, hid, and tricked the prison officers. I first sneaked away and then rushed away from them as fast as I could; they chased me as fast as they could. I was running and running. Finally I reached the gate; the heavy steel doors of the prison seemed to mock my attempt to open them. They were following me and shouting my name, "Jisook, Jisook." When I suddenly opened my eyes widely, my mother was standing beside me and said with fear, "What happened, baby? You will be late for work if you don't get up now." There was a familiar sight, voice, and nice warm smell of my house around me. It was a terrible dream that I have never dreamt about before. I tucked my soft and fluffy bedding up snug and deeply breathed the familiar sweet smell of my room. I was still frightened as I told my mother about the terrible dream. She smiled at me with her soft wink and said, "Baby, it is just a dream. Don't be scared anymore. You will be ok." I was not generally superstitious; however, I did not feel comfortable and safe. That day, I strongly hoped nothing was going to happen to me.

Three years ago on a really cold day in December, I was excited about having my first interview in the U.S. I got up early in the morning. I took a long shower and collected neat formal clothes and shoes that I already prepared the previous day with my mother. I had a late breakfast that was a piece of chocolate muffin and a cup of sweet aroma hazelnut coffee. My mother sipped her favorite coffee and said, "You will get a job. Don't worry too much. The boss will hire you. You'd better smile while you are in the interview." She knew that I was nervous. She always gave me courage and helped me whenever I needed it. I left my house early without worries.

The restaurant was a beautiful fancy medium size Japanese restaurant where I really wanted to work. There were lots of colorful flowers and modern Japanese frames on the wall. The fresh and sweet scent of all the plants made me feel relaxed. The middle aged manager let me sit down at the bar. There were many kinds of wine and cute small bottles of sake. They were organized on the shelf of the wall. She gave me some hot green tea. I drank it; it made me feel comfortable. I looked around the restaurant carefully while I was waiting for my interview. It was a modern simple Japanese restaurant with light Japanese music playing in

the background, and decorated in elegant Asian style with wood and botanical themes. It had a separate bar and dadami rooms. I supposed that it just opened because everything was modern. The boss called me to the office. I knocked and opened the small office which was next to the kitchen and the corner of the restroom. He looked young, handsome and sharp. The diamond earring in his left ear was bright. He wore white chef clothes; I thought he worked as a chef too. He asked me few formal questions. I answered the questions simply, clearly, and naturally with a big smile. Oh! It was a very easy ten minute interview. He just hired me and said shortly, "You can work here as soon as you can. You'd better adjust your schedule with the manager." I was very happy to get a job. I answered cheerfully, "Thank you. I will work as hard as I can."

I worked three days a week as a waitress. I did not have any experience. The bad tempered manager trained me for one month. She was very strict to me and sometimes angry at me when I made mistakes. Nobody was on my side. My co-workers had a lot of experience so they looked down on me. However, I had a lot of working experience in Korea. I was not afraid of new places or relationships. Living in the U.S. trained me to adapt greatly to new surroundings like a chameleon and to make new friends as comfortably as monkeys climb trees. I knew how to survive the new places. I studied the menus and remembered the food lists after work, I tried to be nice to the customers, and I always smiled when other co-workers gave me a hard time. After one month, the training was finished. I learned how to treat customers, and use the cash register during training. I thought that even though being a waitress was not a good position socially, I was proud of my new job and loved to work.

It was Friday. I was afraid to go to work because of the terrible dream. I almost dialed the manager to ask for the day off, but I couldn't do it because I knew she would not let me do it. The boss usually did not let the waitresses have days off on Friday night because it was one of the busiest days in the week. When I left my house to work, I was fearful; however, it was same as other days. It was so busy. There were many customers to enjoy the Friday night. I forgot the terrible dream while I was working. My fear got out of my mind. I just thought about how much money I would make that night. The waitresses walked quickly; the chefs made food fast. Customers complained about slow service. It was the busiest day since I had worked there. Oh! I imagined that I would buy famous designer clothes for my mother and go to the greatest restaurant the next day with the money I made that night. The time went too fast.

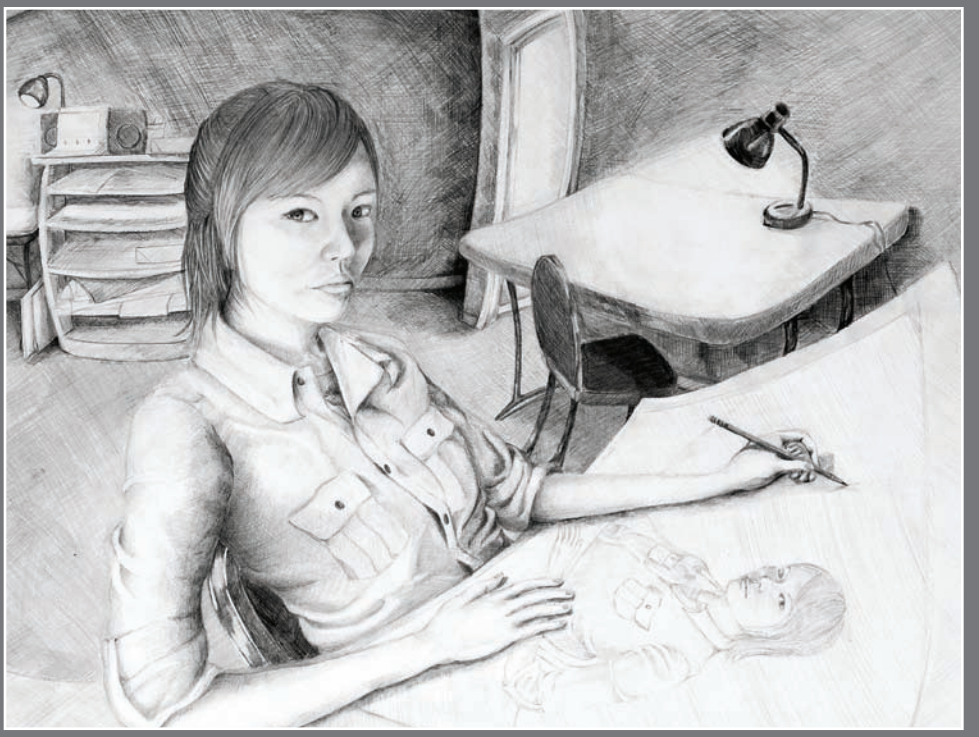
Finally it was time to close. After closing the restaurant, all the employees had to wait until the cash register closed. The smiling boss calculated the money for a long time. His face became darker and darker. He calculated the money again and again. Finally he said, "I don't have enough money. I have a shortage

of 50 dollars in the cash register." Everybody kept silent. They saw each other and shook their heads. At the time, everybody looked at me. My face became redder and redder. My heart was beating faster and faster; it was too fast to breathe in and out easily. I did not do anything wrong. However, I didn't know why I was so nervous and felt as if I was guilty. This situation was similar to my dream. The boss asked us to take out everything from our pockets. As soon as I put my little right hand in my pocket, I touched some little thin paper like money. I took it out of my pocket and put it on the bar. Oh my god! It was a half-folded 50 dollar bill. It was unbelievable and incredible! Why, when, and how did I have 50 dollars in my pocket? Everybody laughed and looked down on me. I couldn't say anything because there was no doubt about it; it was certain evidence. I was driven into a piteous plight and thrown into confusion. I just said silently, "I am not, I am not …" My voice was quivering in tears. My angry boss said loudly and slowly, "I can let you go to prison, but I am not going to call the police. Just get out of here." All the cells of my body were shaken like jelly. I couldn't believe the nonsense happening to me. I lost all my sense while I was driving home.

When I got home, my younger sister opened the door for me. She looked surprised. She asked with a high voice, "Do you have 50 dollars in your pocket? I put it in there yesterday." We wore the same clothing size so we usually shared our clothes. I could not be angry at her. When I explained to my mother about the incident at the restaurant, she felt great sympathy for me and told me about something that I can't remember. However, I remembered it was not very encouraging to me. I decided that I would never work in the U.S. anymore.

After that day, I came back to my normal life; I just stayed home and went to school for studying English two days a week. When I was playing the piano with my younger sister, my mother called me to pick up the phone. I answered cheerfully, "Hello?" I heard a nice low voice, "Hi! How are you? Do you recognize me?" It was my boss. He explained to me after that day, he found 50 dollars on the floor near the cash register, but he couldn't call me right away because he was really embarrassed for that day and asked me to work there again.

I have been working at the restaurant for three years. Now, I just work on weekends as a manager. After that day, I have never doubted anyone about anything without certain evidence. In the past, how many innocent people did I hurt with my false doubt? I regretted it. I could forgive him and my co-workers because I had similar experiences doubting classmates who looked poor when I lost something such as money, books, and expensive pencils at school. The incident hurt my little heart; however, it taught me a lot of lessons I couldn't learn from school.



Untitled
by Sung Suh

CLEAN UP ON AISLE FIVE

by Daynee Rosales

Learning how to shop is a terrifying experience for some of us. With me, shopping boot camp started around the time I turned eleven and went on for six or seven years. After all, we're not all just born shoppers, are we? It's not a genetic trait, like brown hair or ugly moles. It is, however, some sort of characteristic most mothers develop, and it convinces them that it is their sacred duty to pass on their knowledge to their offspring. They teach us, and we don't fail at life. They teach us to pick fruit, toilet paper, and table ornaments, and maybe we won't drop out of college, or die.

She was quite the bargain shopper at first, my mom, I mean. We went to Wal-Mart, K-Mart, or pretty much any store that had "Mart" attached to its name. In many ways, she was the stereotypical bargain shopper; the exhausted-looking mother type, dragging her kid around, begging the child to stop playing with the kitchen mops so she could finish stuffing her cart with soda bottles and go home to make supper. And when the sacrilegious prices of the bath mats at K-Mart were simply "too expensive for a piece of rubber that's only meant to gather soap scum," we went to the dollar store. At first, I didn't really understand why my mom bothered taking me everywhere. She simply shushed me when I asked questions and made me follow her around like a baby chick.
I hated bargain shopping, especially when it was time to move on from groceries to clothes. My crummy food, I could hide from my friends, but my clothes? Once, we'd spend hours looking through the racks at Marshall's and Ross only to find ourselves buying me a pair of jeans that was sewn off center, making the left side of my butt look slightly… wrong. I didn't know what was worse, that I did not notice the mistake at first, or that my mom was convinced I'd "grow into it." That was the excuse she gave for any piece of clothing I wore until I was fifteen, and I could never tell whether she was mocking me or being deadly serious in her assumptions.

I guess everything changed when I turned fifteen. It was either her church friends, or her cancer, or maybe listening to one too many inspirational speakers, but my mom decided that it was time for us to be better. To look better. To feel better. The changes were, at first, gradual. There was suddenly Pottery Barn, Whole Foods, and for the first time I could remember, trips to the mall. Quality over quantity. We no longer found ourselves with the exhausted bargain-hunting moms, but the I-had-a-career-but-then-I-got-married ones. (This kind of mom is very easy to spot. They tend to wear a lot of cashmere and almost always look bored.) There was no more hustling from place to place. What was the point of

rushing anyway? We'd gracefully make our way to the registers as if we were playing make believe, and I was Grace Kelly, and she was Ginger Rogers. She'd hand over her magic credit card and we'd say nonsense thank-yous after Lord and Taylor was done taking our money and kicking us out.

The last time we went shopping together, we needed new cups. Our family had the bad tendency of accidentally breaking the dishes. We also lost a lot of silverware. Whenever we had people over, they had to dine in mismatched plates and cups; all orphaned from previous families. Then one day, out of nowhere, I was dragged on a quest for new cups. We went browsing down the deserted isles of Bed, Bath & Beyond, though my mom seamed aloof and unable to find anything she liked. I pushed the cart and made suggestions to her, showing off all the training she'd installed in me. The elegant glass set, perhaps. Or how about the whimsical set of cups with the dancing fish; to make people think we were fun? She walked over to a display of glass figurines and picked one up without much interest. She called to me without taking her eyes away from the figurine, "How about we get something with clowns?"

I paused. "Mom, you said clowns were stupid. And tacky."

She put the figurine back in place. "Really?" Suddenly bemused, she continued, "Well, forget everything I said. There's nothing good here. Let's go to the thrift store." I thought of everything she had ever said about shopping, every strange detail and rule she had come up with over the years, every contradiction, every infinite moment she'd spend grooming me to be the sophisticated shopper I now was. And then on how she just ruined everything. How about we get something with clowns. I wanted to question her. But she was sick, and you're not supposed to ask sick people questions.

"There's no time to go somewhere else. I'll grab whatever, it's not like these cups are gonna last anyway."

She started echoing me with a higher-pitched Mickey Mouse kind of voice, "It's not like these cups are gonna last anyway."

"Mom, stop it!"

"Mooom, stop it!!"

"Agh! I hate shopping! I'm never coming here with you again!"

She burst into laughter. I growled, something I'd only seen people do in the movies before, and pushed the cart straight down the aisle with too much force, crashing it straight into the display of glass figurines. Some fell to the floor and shattered while others dove into our cart. My mother suddenly looked a little worried, but was still unable to hide her laughter. She started making her way to the exit trying not to be noticed, and I followed her lead. As we left, the speakers called out in a monotone voice, "Clean up on aisle five. Clean up in aisle five." An unexplained laughter erupted from every corner of the store, like surround sound, and I could not help but join in.

When we made it to my car, we were both on the verge of tears from laughing. We sat there for a good ten minutes. I finally started the engine and got us as far away as I could, hoping no one would come running from the store with a ridiculous bill. When we stopped at a light, I turned towards my mom, and found her looking at me as if she were dwelling on the irony of some sort of cruel inside joke I wasn't fully in on. I'm never coming here with you again, my words echoed. My mom faced the road, and smiled.

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About two months after my mom died, I tried to go on a quest for the ugliest, strangest, and lamest cups I could muster. I went shopping by myself for the first time, finally brave enough to dive head-first into the Olympic-sized swimming pool that is the core of American values and beliefs. My new values, those centered on purchasing anything cheap, odd-looking, and with money I didn't really have. Screw Pottery Barn.

I finally got the hang of the whole shopping thing: Clown cups. The only way no one would be tempted to steal them, let alone break them, or drink from them. I once came close to finding such cups, but missed the chance to buy them, out of pure stupidity. I'm starting to think that I'm probably going to have to make these cups myself someday. I'll have to get a set of basic, cream-colored ones, and paint sad clowns on them; such a horrible cliché that even the most obscure depths of retail hell will not hold them. I'll have these clowns doing the most mundane things we all do on a daily basis, all for the sake of absolutely nothing. One of the clowns will be painted tripping on a shoe lace while mowing the lawn, and another crying while getting ready for work. The third will be trying to walk his dog as it chases after a butterfly, and the last will simply be watching television.

They will be perfect.

MY GRANDPARENTS' WARM RUSSIAN HOUSE

by Timur Zotov Alexandrovich

Darkness gradually absorbed the last remnants of light, and I could hear the snow crunching under my feet. Cold, violent wind blew into my face making me shiver. Freezing rain bombarded my body. The ruthless blizzard was sending yet another wave of snow soldiers to attack my eyes that struggled to stay open. Distant noises of village people singing meant that I was close to my destination. I slowly focused my eyes on the place where the sounds were coming from, and saw my grandparents' home.

I finally found myself standing within a few feet of their front door. As I stared up at the house, my eyes feasted on the way the powdery white snow swirled around and engulfed the cozy little home. Icicles dripped from the roof-top and windowpanes as though they were wax melting from a tall candlestick. I knew someone was inside because of the light emanating from the windows and the column of smoke escaping from the chimney. My nose became so red that I thought it was becoming my own icicle. I felt an excruciating pain in my eyelids from trying to hold my eyes open, and so I shut them. I heard a squeaky sound, and felt a certain warmth radiating from something in front of me. It was a luminous light that forced me to open my eyes. I reluctantly raised my head and saw a huge figure with wide shoulders staring at me with big shiny eyes. The light inside the house illuminated the stranger's face and I realized that it was my grandfather.

He was a tall man with a thick, ash-colored beard, and a voice as deep and hearty as a grandfather's voice could ever be. He was a handsome old man with grey hair: He could have been mistaken for a retired Hollywood actor. Despite his old age, he liked to use men's cologne, and I could smell the strong scent of pine trees as I stepped closer. A warm and loving smile appeared on his aging face as he put his large palms on my shoulders and asked me to come in.

When I entered the house, innumerable memories came to mind: the first time I broke my arm falling from the stairs; my first acquaintance with the game of chess; my first dog. It seemed that every detail had a memory attached to it. My grandfather built this house decades ago foreseeing his retirement here, and has never changed anything since. He wanted to preserve every memory that the house could bring. Despite the remoteness of the village, I liked to visit my grandparents. They were a big part of my childhood, and whenever I had a chance to visit them, I did.

From the distinct smell, to the furniture, to the warmth of my grandparents'

smiles, nothing ever changed in this house. The rooms were adorned with time-worn furniture full of character that longed to tell their own stories. Some wallpaper had begun to peel off; some paint began to chip. The floor was scratched and battered, but every scuffmark had a story. The living room was illuminated by light from an elegant chandelier, but the source of heat was from a brick fireplace. The fireplace was like the sun sending its rays of heat all over the living room, making me forget that there was a raging blizzard outside. Next to the fireplace I saw a reclining chair turned towards an old television set playing a classic movie.

She did not watch the black and white film before her as she sat in the chair; her thoughts were elsewhere. She wore an old black sweater and a long, grey skirt that covered her legs. My grandmother had always been vibrant and energetic, but not anymore. Time did not spare her. She became old. Her short, ropy, pale gray hair made her look like a lifeless wax figure. Her lusterless eyes were lost in the deep furrows of her pale skin. She lifted her head up and noticed me. Her eyes filled with tears. I awkwardly came close to her, and she eagerly embraced me with her long, skinny arms. I was entirely overcome by the warmth and comfort that was transmitted to me through this hug. She had not seen me for several months. Every time I came to visit them, she would always be stirred by passion and excitement. My heart became full to see the twinkle in her eyes.

My grandmother was always like this: loving and warm, always seeing something special in me that made her eyes twinkle with excitement. When I was a child, she was always there for me. I remember falling from the narrow stairway in the house and breaking my arm. I had to sleep in the upstairs bedroom because of the queen size bed. A dark, cold room without any electric light, the odor of old furniture permeated the room; however, I liked the comfort of the huge bed. The sheets were always clean and white, and the pillows were uncommonly comfortable. Despite the comfort of the bed, my broken arm caused nightmares. Drops of cold sweat emerged on my forehead and I would scream with an intense vigor for help. The door would open and my grandmother would step inside the room, making it seem as though she was floating. Her soft tone calmed me down; her heartwarming touch caused gladness and tender feelings in me. I could not sleep after such a terrible nightmare, and my grandmother decided to sing me a lullaby. Her beautiful voice melted my heart, filtering out all signs of fear and replacing them with safety and serenity. I looked at those tender, genuine, and sincere eyes and I felt loved. Tears of joy and happiness slowly escaped my tear ducts and gently ran alongside my cheek. She kissed me gently and asked me to go back to sleep. I have never had any nightmares in that room since. I just needed to think of my grandmother's smile and all the pain went away.

I put my bags in the room and felt my stomach rumble. I had not eaten anything since morning. All at once I picked up the scent of freshly baked duck.

My grandmother never failed at cooking something delicious, but this exceeded my expectations. I remember year after year, her baked duck had slowly become a staple to any visit. I noticed my grandmother was setting the table for the dinner. She used her porcelain dinnerware set that reflected light from the chandelier. My grandmother's own mother had passed down the dinnerware set to her, and she used it only during special occasions.

My grandfather and I arranged the chairs around the table and waited for the delicious meal. The desire to eat was intensified by the delicious smell coming from the kitchen. It reminded me of my childhood. She was a great cook, running back and forth from the kitchen until the whole table was filled with various Russian traditional meals. Finally, we sat to dine and my grandfather said a prayer. After dinner, my grandmother brought her special secret recipe pancakes. My eyes nearly darted out of their sockets from excitement. She knew I loved these pancakes. They were thick and cake-like, with layers of chocolate truffle cream and chocolate mousse topped with fresh strawberries. Every morning as a young boy, my grandmother would make these pancakes for me. As soon as my tongue touched this culinary masterpiece, I felt euphoria all over my body, and nostalgia from my youth.

My grandparents took great care of me while I was growing up, and I love them for this. But my love was not only for the relationship with my grandparents, it was for many other things as well. Love is the distinctive smell in their house, the sound of the wall clock, the scratched and squeaky floor. Love is that atmosphere inside the house through which my childhood passed. As I think of their house in that small Russian village, I am reminded that though it has been more than two years since they passed away, the memories will always stand strong like that house, and will always be there to light my way. These memories will remind me of that special love that can only come from family.

COLOR THEORY

by Izzi Angel

Calliope Honorable Mention 2009, Literary Submissions

They say she's too green to sing the blues
like Billie done; her strange fruit is an unpollinated
bud that never has or ever will see Papa Sun.

Her lilting cries of pain don't have enough history
in them to satisfy the tumbled-silky old cats who
used to make the birds chirp like anything way back
when their pajamas were the nattiest in town.

Even if she could make saints walk the streets
of New Orleans just to be closer to her voice,
back at the lounge they'd still want capital-H Holiday tides
she's prohibited from getting her pantaloons wet in
'cause she was born on the white side of the tracks,
away from the musical creating of the shoeshine-blue ocean.

Revolutions later, she dreams of the colorblind fruit she has borne
running off toward the sun with his graceful, brassy, trumpet of a lover
and trying to find Louis in the sounds of sticky, shrimp gumbo air.

STEP STEP STOMP REPEAT

by Deena El-Rashed

Step, step, stomp. Repeat. The loud booming of each step in unison echoes throughout the auditorium. Step, step, stomp. Repeat. The choreography replays itself over and over again in my head, around and around, just as the semi-circle we've created with our bodies does around the stage. The steady beat of each heel hitting the wooden floor boards at once holds just as much beauty as the carefully memorized maneuvering of our feet. The line rotates and I am now at center stage, but it is careful thought that keeps my back straight, head up, and feet moving because never is the urge greater than at this moment to look down at the continually stepping line of feet. However, I remind myself that to do so is to risk breaking the connection with the audience, and to risk the loss of the awe which the dance invokes. My turn at center stage comes to an end as the line rotates back around again. Taking advantage of my brisk moment out of the eye of the audience, I quickly sneak a look at my group's feet. Pride overwhelms me as I see that not one pair of perfectly shined shoes is out of sync. Suddenly, my mind flashes back to the collection of clumsy feet presented to me just a few weeks prior. I was told to "Teach them well because Debka is the traditional dance of your homeland; performing it is an honor and doing it well should be a point of pride for all of you." The added pressure of my Sunday school principal only increased my eagerness to get started and to make sure every one of my students not only learned to perform it well, but also learned to appreciate the value behind it. Debka is not a dance in which one looks to find personal spot-light; it is one that teaches you the beauty and importance of teamwork and unity, a rudimentary value of our Middle Eastern community. The interlocking of our hands not only provides a sense of support throughout the performance but also reflects the idea of support which our community is built upon. As Arabs growing up in a western society it is important that we remember to hold the values of our culture near to us, and the sense of community which the class creates in the children gives them the strength to do so by giving them a way take pride in their heritage, allowing them to grow up not only as strong Arabs but as strong people in general. Just then, the line rotates back around again as I lead them to their final positions. The faces of our awe-struck audience appear back into view again and suddenly our weeks of sweaty practices held in stuffy basements all seem worth the effort. The added hours of practice outside of dance class, the sacrifice of my free time, it's all worth it, and now there's only one last thing for us to do: step, step, stomp. Repeat.

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